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Connally
Gives Agnew
Stout Defense

By Lou Cannon

Washington Post Staff Writer

LOS ANGELES, Sept. 28—John B. Connally came before a cheering Republican audience today to stoutly defend Vice President Agnew's right to be presumed innocent of accusations that he took kickbacks from Maryland contractors.

But Connally ruined the emotional high point of his defense when he made a slip of the tongue and declared that he hoped Agnew would be "completely exonerated" and "found guilty."

Connally appeared both surprised and embarrassed when he was informed afterward of what he had said. He promptly apologized to Agnew at a press conference, but the luncheon of the National Federation of Republican Women was already over.

In the course of proclaiming that Agnew was innocent until proven guilty, during his speech Connally made this remark:

"Whatever the merits of the case, he is entitled to fair treatment under the judicial system of these United States. I do hope and pray that the facts are such that he is completely exonerated — and that he is found guilty."

The usually smooth-talking Connally proceeded through the rest of his speech without any sign of awareness that he had done what he deplored and pronounced Agnew guilty. The speech dealt with patriotic themes in which Connally extolled the virtues of the "capitalistic system" and the

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necessity of strong defense and tight money.

When he met with the press afterward, Connally said he had meant to say that Agnew was "not guilty."

The former Texas governor and Treasury Secretary declined to get into any discussion of widespread reports that he is President Nixon's first choice to succeed Agnew if the Vice President resigns.

However, while turning aside questions and saying that he neither expected nor desired Agnew to quit, Connally did say in response to one query that he could "conceive of it happening."

The response came in answer to a question about whether Connally could conceive of himself succeeding to the vice presidency.

Asked about whether he still had a close relationship with President Nixon, Connally said, "As far as I know the President and I get along."

Agnew, meanwhile, flew from Washington to Palm Springs to spend the night at the home of his friend, entertainer Frank Sinatra. The Vice President is scheduled to speak here Saturday in what an aide said will be a "fighting speech."

Another person close to Agnew said that the Vice President views the speech here before an organization that has always been friendly to him as an important test of his ability to rally Republicans in his defense. This source said that he expects Agnew to "carry his case to the people" in the form of televised speeches and other public appearances if he is well received here.

Reports circulated at the Republican women's conven-

tion that supporters of the Vice President will stage an emotional pro-Agnew demonstration when he speaks Saturday morning.

Connally addressed the GOP women before a star-spangled blue background that was decorated with pictures of President Nixon, Agnew and California Gov. Ronald Reagan and with a banner declaring, "Premiere of a Republican Majority."

Reagan was the featured convention speaker here tonight, and his backers made no secret of the fact that the governor is, like Connally, testing the presidential waters. Reagan's chief talking point is a controversial initiative on the November ballot that will limit the total percentage of taxes which can be levied by state and local government.

Every mention of Reagan's name has been cheered by the convention.

In his news conference, Connally appeared to back off a statement he made in Washington two weeks ago about the President's authority to disobey a Supreme Court order.

In Washington, on Sept. 10, Connally, after saying he did not want to judge the merits of the White House tape recordings controversy, was asked if there were "any circumstances under which a President is justified in refusing to obey a Supreme Court decision?"

"Oh, sure," he said. "We're leading ourselves into believing the Supreme Court is the ultimate arbiter of all disputes, and I don't believe it. I think there are times when the President of the United States would be right in not obeying a decision of the Supreme Court."