



## Connally's Meeting With the President

Question at Ford news conference,  
filed Ford Ad 12 Feb 75.

**Andrew Tully**

**M**EMBERS of the special Watergate prosecution staff are undecided whether President Ford's private chat with John B. Connally, under indictment for bribery and perjury, adds up to a plus or minus for Connally's defense.

On the one hand, there is the prospect that a jury will be impressed with the statesman's role implied for Connally by the Ford meeting in Houston. It is a human failing of many Americans to believe that an individual who hobnobs with the great and who owns a few million dollars need not stoop to take a \$10,000 bribe or to tell a fib under oath.

But after Watergate and the forced resignations of both a President and Vice President, there is an air of skepticism, if not cynicism, abroad.

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**I**F I WERE Ed Williams, I'd think hard about this one," said a prominent Washington criminal lawyer. "I'm not so damn sure I'd mention Connally's meeting with Ford to a jury. These days, some juries bring an antiestablishment prejudice into the courtroom."

Williams is a distinguished attorney, a kind of Babe Ruth of the profession. As Connally's counsel at the trial tentatively scheduled to open here April 1, Williams will do his best to convince the jury that his client's stature puts him above any crime more serious than exceeding the speed limit.

As for President Ford, it is hard to

see anything sinister in his meeting with Connally. One simply cannot imagine Mr. Ford meddling with justice. He is just not that sort of a man. But he is a man with considerable human compassion who sometimes lets that compassion rule his mind. So he goofed.

The goof was not in seeing Connally, a former Treasury Secretary and a new Republican who as a Democrat worked hard for Mr. Nixon in 1972. Connally, after all, is something of an economic expert and Mr. Ford has lots of economic problems. And Connally is innocent until proved guilty.

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**N**O. MR. FORD'S mistake was in seeing Connally privately—in singling him out for special attention. Connally was to have been only one of 16 Texas politicians invited to confer with the President. But by the time Connally arrived from a business trip to Canada, the session was drawing to a close. So he was sequestered in a hotel room with word that Mr. Ford would see him later, a deux.

This was about as dumb as could be imagined.

As it was, Mr. Ford made Connally a privileged character whose starring role diminished the importance of the other conferees. Ford was saying in effect that a new Republican under indictment was No. 1 in the pecking order of a Republican powwow.