

Connally Bid Not Ruled Out

By Jules Witcover

SAN FRANCISCO, July 29—Vice President Gerald R. Ford, now considered the odds-on favorite to be the Republican presidential nominee in 1976, declined today to rule out former Texas Gov. John B. Connally as a competitor because of Connally's indictment in the Nixon milk fund controversy.

"I presume John Connally is innocent like any other American until he has his day in court," Ford told reporters as he continued his swing around the country proclaiming the innocence of President Nixon in his impeachment crisis.

"I believe John Connally should be given the same treatment as any other American," the Vice President said. "I think his political chances will depend on what happens when he is brought to trial. It would be tragic if a man was precluded, in my judgment, from being a candidate predicated solely on an indictment."

News of the Connally indictment injected a new element into Ford's visit here, ostensibly to address the National Urban League con-

vention but obviously to rally public and Republican Party support for the President. Once again, Ford expressed his personal belief that Mr. Nixon "is innocent of an impeachable offense" in the Watergate cover-up and associated scandals.

The Vice President conceded again that the House Judiciary Committee's decision to send articles of impeachment to the House floor "narrows the odds" against the President. Asked about speculation that House Minority Leader John Rhodes of Arizona might vote for impeachment, Ford said such a vote "would obviously have a significant impact on the vote in the House of Representatives." But Ford said that in conversations with him, Rhodes had not "indicated categorically how he intended to vote on this issue."

In his speech to the 64th annual convention of the National Urban League, Ford said the heavy concentration of blacks in the Democratic Party "will not produce good government, it is not good for either political party, nor is it good for the black community."

Citing progress for blacks within the Republican administration, Ford said eight blacks held sub-Cabinet positions in the first Nixon administration and he named seven others serving in the second. Their appointments, he said, were "not tokenism (but) mainstream America."

Accompanying the Vice President on this trip are two blacks, Stan Scott, an assistant to the President for minority affairs, and former assistant Secretary of Labor for employment standards Arthur A. Fletcher, now a private management consultant on jobs in Washington, according to Ford's press secretary, Paul Miltich, there are at least three blacks on the Vice President's staff—one in charge of mail, one in charge of Ford's two limousines, and at least one secretary.

"Although not what you might like it to be," Ford told the Urban League, "my civil rights record is anything but negative and it is a long, long way from standing in the doorway of a schoolhouse in defiance of a federal court order in an attempt to deny black children a quality education"—

obviously a reference to Gov. George C. Wallace's similar earlier defiance in Alabama.

Ford said that "since I became your Vice President I sincerely tried to be Vice President of all the people." He listed many meetings he has had with black leaders "to illustrate that my door is open to all."

In Pomona, Kan., Sen. Bob Dole (R-Kan.) called for increased security protection for Ford, commenting, "It would be a tragedy of profound magnitude if something should happen to Ford that could be prevented by adequate security precautions and protection."