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For John Connally: No Room at the Top

John Connally is easing his way out of the post of special adviser to the President. But not for the trivial personal reasons which have set the gossip mills spinning.

Gov. Connally is going because there is no room for a truly big man in the Nixon White House. His departure thus signals a condition that spells bad news for all of us.

Before setting out what happened—and did not happen—to Connally and the White House, it is necessary to say a word about the man himself. His faults are well-known. He is vain, mercurial and bound by undoubted attachments to the interests of the rich and the powerful.

But for all his flaws, Connally cuts a large personal figure. Whether as a lawyer or a Cabinet member, he is used to dealing with big problems. He takes the issues head-on without fooling himself or the public. He is probably the ablest man in American politics today.

Set against that background, most of the stories of what happened to Connally in the White House simply fall apart. Take, for example, the story that Connally was personally piqued and decided to go on a 60-day cruise with his wife to show his resentment. The story is just untrue. Connally had planned such a trip. It was to begin on June 3. He cancelled those plans to work for Mr. Nixon. He has still not rescheduled the trip.

A second story is that the appointment of former Defense Secretary Melvin Laird to the White House staff left no room for another major figure. Connally dismisses that speculation as ridiculous. He believes the President can—and should—take counsel from a wide range of advisers. For his own part, he sees no problem in serving in the same group of advisers as Mr. Laird.

Then, there is the story of a bitter clash between Connally and Secretary of the Treasury George Shultz on the issue of braking inflation. It is true that Connally and Shultz were at odds back in 1971. But during most of the recent discussions the two men were allied in opposing the kind of blanket controls the President applied to prices last week. They worked together with great harmony, and even in private they now both sing each other's praises.

The true source of Connally's difficulties at the White House had nothing to do with a single issue or a single person. It involved his concept of the job. Connally's notion was that he would give advice to the President as an equal, not as a junior assistant tugging on his forelock every time he entered the Oval Office. He was determined to tell the truth as he saw it and in no uncertain terms.

In that vein he discussed with Mr. Nixon the political and psychological impact of Watergate on domestic affairs and on international matters. He cited for Mr. Nixon the various polls which showed that large numbers of Americans believed the President himself was culpable in one way or another. He recommended that Mr. Nixon make a clean breast of the matter in press conferences and other public appearances.

In the same vein, Connally talked with Ron Ziegler, the President's press secretary. Connally pointed out to Mr. Ziegler that he lacked credibility with journalists and his every press conference was a confrontation. Despite Con-

nally's seeming denial yesterday he told Ziegler, "If I were in your shoes, I'd be looking for another job."

The Connally advice on how to deal with Watergate has not been taken. Mr. Nixon is not facing the issue boldly. He is invoking national security and riding the coattails of Leonid Brezhnev. Insofar as he acknowledges trouble, he blames it on the men who used to be around him. Far from looking for another job, Mr. Ziegler, who has the leverage of knowing who told him what lies to tell about Watergate when, seems to have risen in the White House hierarchy.

So John Connally is bowing out, and his departure demonstrates that Mr. Nixon is unwilling to face the censure of his peers. The President is trying to slither through Watergate and that says foreboding things about his capacity to restore the country's morale and manage its difficult economic problems in the months ahead.

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