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Connally Is Departing, Concedes Frustration

By David S. Broder
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John B. Connally signed off his temporary White House assignment yesterday, saying he was "not unhappy about anything," but clearly indicating he wants to pursue his political future on his own.

The former Texas governor and recent convert to the Republican Party said he hoped to end "by midsummer at the latest" the post-Watergate advisory role for which President Nixon recruited him last May.

In a 45-minute White House press conference, he denied that the President had rejected his advice on economic policy, denied that he had unsuccessfully urged the firing of presidential press secretary Ronald Ziegler and insisted that he had "no indication" his advice "was unwanted at all."

But he essentially confirmed the spate of recent stories of his frustration in his unpaid and understaffed advisory role, telling reporters, "You have some leakers that are fairly accurate in what they're leaking to you."

The white-haired Texan, who served for a year and a half as Secretary of the Treasury in the first Nixon administration, said, "Obviously, I am not being fully utilized in an advisory

capacity. I have no operational responsibilities . . . Obviously, I have time when I could be doing other things. I am catching up on reading. I am doing a lot of things."

At another point, Connally told reporters: "I think I have given about all the advice I have to give . . . so how long do I stay in this posture?"

The impression Connally left with newsmen was that the second White House interlude was a chapter he wanted to make "as short . . . as possible," but that he wanted to leave without signaling a public break with a President whose help may be important in realizing his future political ambitions.

Connally said he wanted to make a twice-postponed world trip later this summer and then "pick up the strings" of the Houston law practice and the corporate directorships, which he resigned when Mr. Nixon summoned him back to duty on May 10—just after he had renounced his lifetime Democratic affiliation and declared himself a Republican.

As is his custom, Connally said "I don't have any" designs on the 1976 presidential nomination of his new

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By Margaret Thomas—The Washington Post

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party, but said he expected to be out campaigning for Republican candidates in the 1974 mid-term election, "if anybody wants me to."

His remarks were devoid of the praise for Mr. Nixon that he lavished on the President in 1971 and 1972, and frequently the ex-governor seemed to be at pains to say he was not taking responsibility for either the operations of the White House or its recent decision-making.

He said he knew "nothing whatever" about the Watergate case and had never discussed it with the President, "except as it is related to the overall problems of this country."

He said "there is no question" that "it has been harmful to the administration. He repudiated the phrase, attributed to him in two recent reports, that the White House "is a screwed-up mess," but said that "obviously, with the changes in the staff...there has to be a process of rebuilding...I think you are going to have a certain confusion...but I don't know that that is anything to moan and groan about."

Connally, regarded as perhaps the most influential of the President's advisers in his first administration tour, indicated he saw no real role for himself in the new scheme of things. He also expressed skepticism about Mr. Nixon's willingness or ability to change his style of leadership.

Saying he did not want to discuss the conditions that had allowed the Watergate scandal to occur, Connally said:

"I will simply say to you that a part of the man's (Mr. Nixon's) discipline, part of the manner of operation...resulted in an enormous delegation of authority and responsibility. That has been his style of operation."

"I think it will continue to be... (the) style of his operation, the delegation of enormous authority to other people . . . That is the way he is. I don't think you are going to change him or I am going to change him or anybody else is going to change him. You have to take him for

what he is, as you do any President . . ."

Connally was repeatedly drawn back by questions to his reported effort to persuade the President to drop Ziegler as his press secretary or shift him to other duties. But he would not go beyond his statement that "I have not said . . . Ziegler should resign from the staff"

"I am not going to stand here and tell you that Ron Ziegler ought to be or ought not to be out here," he said. "That is not my job."

He said he had discussed press relations with the President and had told him reporters were necessarily in "an adversary position" and that "you weren't ever going to have a love feast."

Connally said, "I think he really wants some improvement," and added, "I hope you all do."

Then he drew a laugh by remarking: "I frankly feel like at this moment in time, if he flew to the moon tomorrow, you all wouldn't give him credit for courage. You would say he was fleeing out of fear."