

Acquitted



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JOHN CONNALLY AND WIFE, NELLIE
'We're happy,' he said after the verdict

Connally Cleared Of Bribe Charges

Washington

John B. Connally, the millionaire Texas politician who was mentioned as a major 1976 presidential contender before becoming involved in a Nixon administration scandal, was acquitted yesterday by a U.S. District Court jury here.

The jury deliberated about 5½ hours before returning its verdict, which clears Connally of two charges that he took \$5000 in illegal payoffs from dairy producers on two occasions in 1971 while he was secretary of the treasury.

Texas lawyer Jake Jacobsen had testified he gave the total of \$10,000 to Connally for his backing of a 1971 milk price support increase.

Connally, one of eight children of a bus driver, was sitting quietly reading the Bible in the courtroom when the jury returned.

Connally's wife, Nellie, said later she thought the judge would merely announce that the jury was going to dinner. But within

minutes, the foreman — whose identity has been kept secret along with those of the other jurors — stood, gripped the rail and said in a firm voice: "We find the defendant not guilty."

Nellie Connally bowed her head into her hands and whispered audibly, "O h, thank you!"

Connally grasped his wife in a bearhug, then embraced his daughter, Sharon, and his two daughters-in-law. The younger Connally women wept. Attorney Edward Bennett Williams hugged and kissed Mrs. Connally and then Connally himself.

Mrs. Connally looked at her husband in the crowd and said: "Now, everybody knows what we know."

"We're happy," Connally told reporters after the verdict. "I suppose we never felt like there could be any outcome but this — but they made us worry about it for some time this afternoon."

Connally was asked if he

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would re-enter political life.

"I won't think about it for some time but I hope I never lose a desire to be involved in political affairs. But in what way, I don't know."

The jury also included, besides the white foreman, six black women, three black men and two white women. The jurors looked drawn and tired as they returned to the courtroom and did not look at Connally.

There are still three criminal charges against Connally growing out of the alleged illegal payoffs. U.S. District Chief Judge George L. Hart Jr. earlier ruled that those charges — two counts of perjury and one count of conspiracy to obstruct justice by committing perjury — must be tried separately from the payoff counts.

Members of the Watergate Special Prosecution Force said they will have no comment "at this time" on those pending charges, which allege that Connally and Jacobsen concocted a cover story to conceal the payoffs and that Connally lied under oath as a part of that cover-up.

The verdict made it clear that the jurors did not believe the testimony of Jacobsen, who has pleaded guilty of making the illegal payoffs to Connally. Jacobsen entered his plea and agreed to testify against Connally after extensive plea bargaining with prosecutors.

Several legal sources have

said they consider it unlikely for Connally to be tried on the remaining charges, because those charges grow out of an alleged attempt to cover up a crime that a jury has now found that he did not commit.

Either the prosecutors could move to dismiss the remaining charges, or the defense could ask the judge to dismiss them. Based on the evidence presented in the Connally trial, practically all the government's evidence in connection with the coverup charges was presented to the jury.

Connally had been the fourth Nixon administration cabinet member to be charged with a crime, and the first former cabinet member in five decades to be charged with a bribery-related offense.

The Nixon administration's cabinet officers who have been convicted or pleaded guilty to crimes are former Attorney General John N. Mitchell, convicted in the Watergate coverup; former Attorney General Richard J. Kleindienst, who pleaded guilty of testifying inaccurately before a Senate committee, and former Commerce Secretary Maurice Stans, who pleaded guilty of five misdemeanor violations of campaign contribution laws.

Two of those cabinet members, Stans and Mitchell, earlier had been acquitted by a federal jury in New York on charges of violating campaign financing laws.

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