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John Connally might accept the offer to be Richard Nixon's Vice President in 1972 if he's asked, LIFE magazine says this week.

In a story on the Treasury Secretary who is a Democrat in a Republican Administration, LIFE's White House columnist Hugh Sidey writes:

"There are a growing number of people in Nixon's court and outside who think the odds for Connally are getting better. The prospect is not necessarily pleasing to some.

"A few days ago, the very top Democrats of the city (Washington) gathered secretly to dine with Connally, and when it was over a former Cabinet officer wondered, 'Can this country stand another Lyndon Johnson?'"

Sidey writes that the resemblance between Connally and fellow Texan Democrat Johnson, from whose shadow he has now emerged, is startling sometimes. "But there are vital differences," he adds. "Connally is more reserved, less offensive, more sensitive to the world around him."

Connally himself is quoted in the article as saying: "There are no leaders in my party. We've got no one who stands out." He also lavishes praise on Nixon-- "a great man of courage."

"There's something behind that sort of talk," Sidey writes. "Those who know Texans can smell it. Only the highest rewards satisfy their gnawing ambitions. That's why Connally might accept the offer to be Nixon's Vice President if that offer ever came."

(MORE)

Sidey writes that Connally's basic strength is that he knows people and politicians.

"At the White House, they give Connally more than just respect," says one Nixon man. "It's idolatry."

Sidey adds:

"What ultimately happens to John Connally depends on Nixon more than anyone. 'We are close, but not intimate,' says Connally. But there is little doubt that he is for the moment one of the two or three most important advisers to the President.

"He is at the White House for breakfast, lunch, dinner and in between. He has counseled the President on economic matters, military affairs, trade, foreign policy, domestic crises, the Calley verdict and high-level politics.

"Connally sat with the Nixon family at the State of the Union address. He has been to Camp David and San Clemente. Nixon said, 'This man Connally is one of this many people (he held up his hand with five fingers extended) who understand the role and use of U.S. power in the world.'"

Sidey says of Connally that he is one of those men just below the summit who have the ability and the energy to be President "but who have never been able to roll the dice just right." He continues:

"They move restlessly in the substructure, experimenting with combinations of power and people, hoping for some magic that will let them into the select company of serious contenders.

"Poor boy, Lyndon Johnson protege, Secretary of the Navy, millionaire lawyer, Texas governor, lifelong Democrat, man who was wounded in the Kennedy death car--John Connally has now joined the enemy in his bizarre search for fulfillment."

Sidey says that it will take more than ordinary circumstances to push aside John Connally. "No matter what happens, this city is going to be a lot more interesting because of him."

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