

MAY 2 1972

THE NEW YORK TIMES, TUESDAY, MAY 2, 1972

Nixon Samples Good Life at Connally's Ranch

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, May 1—President Nixon looked beyond the tight circle of reporters around him and, for a brief moment, seemed literally to inhale the symbols of good Texas living that John Connally had spread before him: the sleek Santa Gertrudis cattle grazing peacefully on the Treasury Secretary's manicured acres, the executive jets perched proudly on his private airstrip beyond, the butane-fired barbecue pit where ranchhands roasted the sweet corn.

"I think," the President said, "that I have learned more about Texas on this brief visit than at any other time."

A 'Social Occasion'

This was, of course, precisely what Mr. Connally had in mind when he invited the President and his wife to drop by Mr. Connally's Picoso Ranch near Floresville last evening for steaks and drinks with some 200 of Mr. Connally's old friends and political supporters—an evening that amounted to a guided tour of the same Texas power structure that sustained Lyndon Johnson in his career and started Mr. Connally on his.

In a long effusive intro-

duction at dinner later in the evening, after the steaks and sweet corn had disappeared under a cascade of Moët and Chandon champagne, Mr. Connally described the purposes of the dinner to the President. It was, he said, primarily a "social occasion," full of old friends, but he wanted the President to know that those who had been so friendly to him in the past might also be persuaded to help Mr. Nixon with those two fine old Texas commodities, political experience and money.

"I have never learned much in politics," he said with a self-effacing smile. "But I always learn that you had to fish with live bait. And we are not without some in this gathering this evening."

And what bait they were, or might be, for a President who very much wants Texas' 26 electoral votes as insurance against the loss of some other large state that supported him in 1968: George Brown, unknown outside Texas, but head of the state's largest construction concern, Brown and Root; Robert J. Kleberg, of the King Ranch; John D. Murchison, the Dallas oilman; and, with almost perfect symbolism, former Gov. Allen Shivers, who led the defection of the Texas

Democrats to Dwight Eisenhower in 1952.

The news these days is of voter alienation, of the establishment, of George McGovern and George Wallace and anyone else who is asking the voters to "send a message" to those in power.

But this was not the message emerging from the Picoso Ranch last night. The message—and there was one—was that establishment Republicans and establishment Democrats, at least those in Texas, are perfectly capable of getting together to try to withstand the challenge from the left.

Neither Mr. Connally nor Mr. Nixon tried to conceal their ideological affinity or their politicians' respect for one another.

Mr. Connally called the President a "mentally and physically disciplined" man who "understands the role that this nation plays among the nations of the world." In return, Mr. Nixon described his host as "a man who has demonstrated that he is capable of holding any job in the United States that he would like to pursue."

The Secretary of the Treasury was not only a gracious host but also a skilled impresario. During dinner, he suggested that Mr. Nixon might wish to answer a few

questions from the guests, and the President agreed. For an hour, he told them what he believed and what they wished to hear — on busing, on the economy, on the oil depletion allowance.

However, he reserved his strongest words for the war in Vietnam.

The South Vietnamese, he said, were fighting well. But they still required American naval and air support, and he intended to give it to them as long as they needed it.

Danger From 'Take-Over'

To do any less, he insisted, would be to insure a "Communist take-over," which in turn could weaken the office of the Presidency, damage respect for the United States around the world, "destroy the confidence of the American people," and lead to further Communist adventures in Europe, the Middle East and elsewhere.

All of this gave reporters present, especially those who had once covered Lyndon Johnson, a deep sense of déjà vu, for they had heard much the same kind of talk from another President on yet another Texas ranch between 1965 and 1968.

But if there were any dissenters to Mr. Nixon's strong sentiments at the dinner they did not make themselves heard.