

John Connally, the Short-Term Aide



Mary McGrory

JOHNNY CONNALLY is taking the course that was advocated for heartbroken 19th century maidens when the romance was over. The President's short-term special adviser is going around the world.

Politically, he may never come back.

In his departure-announcement news conference, the silver-haired Texan said some things about Richard Nixon which may have lost him the presidential favor that was his greatest asset in the struggle for the Republican nomination.

He could not, he said, for instance, change the President. The President is going to continue to operate the way he always has — which was, of course, the way that landed him in Watergate.

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CONNALLY'S faux pas is said to be that in his visits to the Oval Office, he suggested that Watergate was a problem. That is heresy in the White House. He is further said to have advocated meeting it head-on, which is his style, but blasphemy in circles where the creed is that after John Dean, the flood will recede.

As a result of his unorthodox thinking, apparently, Connally's advice was not often sought. He remarked dryly in his spirited exchange with reporters that he was "catching up on my reading."

Connally must see now that he fared better as a Democrat for Nixon than as a Republican with Nixon. His friends begged him not to abandon formally the party he deserted in 1972.

Arthur Hoppe is on vacation.

In the weeks preceding his conversion, they begged him to consider that the Democrats have not an inevitable choice for next time. They pointed out that fellow-Texan Robert Strauss, Democratic National Committee chairman, would help bring about a reconciliation. As a Democratic standard-bearer, with a party chastened by a leftist fling, he would attract Republican votes and Republican money, they told him.

Connally agreed with their analysis of the Democratic contenders, but insisted that the Democrats would never come back to his kind of conservative, big-business philosophy.

"It was a historic blunder," mourned one of his old friends. "As a Democrat he had bargaining power with the President. As a Republican he had none."

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THE FORMER Secretary of the Treasury is represented by his fans as a man taken in by the White House gang.

What Connally had in mind was a high-visibility special-mission, as an in-and-out kind of assignment. Instead, the White House announced he was joining the team. This raised the cry of "conflict of interest" and Connally had to resign from his law firm and his directorships.

Instead of darting about the country and the world as a trouble-shooter, he spent hours in his Mayflower Hotel suite, waiting for the call that seldom came.

New York Times