

By CHRISTOPHER LYDON

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WASHINGTON, July 23— Charles Alan Wright, the White House lawyer who said "no" today to the Watergate prosecutor's request for tapes of President Nixon's office conversations, is a self-styled "conservative" law professor from the University of Texas. His prodigious output and his sparkling intellect have however, made him a universally respected figure in the American bar and a special favorite of liberals. Nicholas Johnson, a boat-rocking Democrat on the Federal Communications Commission, recalled his old teacher today as perhaps "the most brilliant mind I've ever encountered" — a man who could cite cases and fine points of legal opinion without ever taking a note to class and who wrote a path-breaking casebook on remedies in three weeks, "work that would have taken anybody else three years."

When Mr. Johnson, as the University of Texas Law Review editor, needed a lead article in a hurry, Professor Wright produced it in an afternoon. When Ronnie Dugger, the muckraking journalist, wanted a "House Republican" on The Texas Observer, he enlisted Mr. Wright, who remained a contributing editor of the anti-establishment monthly until late last year. Yet Mr. Wright's contributions to The Texas Observer also document his conservatism and his long-standing devotion to Richard M. Nixon.

**Hiss Case Hailed**

"I have more confidence in Dick Nixon, the man, than I do in Jack Kennedy, the man," Mr. Wright wrote in The Observer in November, 1960. "I cannot vote for a candidate who to this day does not view McCarthyism as an issue of moral principle, as is said of Kennedy by his own friendly biographer.

"Mr. Nixon's record in this area is not perfect," he continued, "but his personal participation in the Hiss hearings is a model of how



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*Self-styled conservative*

a responsible lawyer and Congressman can investigate Communism without threatening civil liberties."

Four years later, in the same publication, Mr. Wright explained his reluctant vote against Senator Barry Goldwater, the Republican candidate for President.

"I could vote for a candidate who is skeptical about the United Nations, critical of Social Security, against Medicare and Federal aid to education, and in favor of selling the Tennessee Valley Authority.

"I cannot vote for a candidate whose election would be regarded as a mandate to slow down on civil rights and to take a harder, more dangerous line of foreign relations. Accordingly I will vote for Lyndon B. Johnson."

Mr. Wright is something of a celebrity in Austin, Tex. — a standing-room only law lecturer, as well as an Episcopal vestryman, a trustee of the Austin symphony, an excellent golfer and a flamboyant party-giver.

He is further identified with the State of Texas as its advocate in a number of major arguments before the Supreme Court of the United States—including court tests of the 18-year-old vote and abolition of the death penalty, both of which he opposed and on both of which he lost.

Yet he is an Easterner by birth and education. He was born in Philadelphia on Sept. 3, 1927, the son of a reporter on the Evening Bulletin. He graduated from Wesleyan University in Connecticut in 1947 and took his law degree at Yale two years later before embarking on a teaching career at the University of Minnesota.

**Court Procedure Book**

It was at Minnesota that he first met Harry A. Blackmun, now a Justice of the Supreme Court, and wrote "Wright's Minnesota Rules," that have made him a premier authority on court procedure.

He moved to the University of Texas in 1955 and has been Charles T. McCormick Professor of Law there since 1965. Throughout, he has been such a passionate coach of the law school touch-football team that some have suggested he recruited apt athletes.

Students also supposed, more seriously, that Mr. Wright, who loves to drop personal references to great jurists, always longed for appointment to the Supreme Court — an ambition he now disclaims. Yet he always had an unmistakable reverence for the Constitution and the Court.

Judge William M. Taylor Jr. of Dallas tells a story about Mr. Wright's life-long dream of owning a Cadillac. When he finally decided to buy one, the auto salesman remarked, "isn't it a shame what the Supreme Courts doing to the country!" Mr. Wright, shocked, asked the salesman for directions to the nearest Lincoln Continental dealership, and he has been driving Continentals ever since.

Mr. Wright said this afternoon that his only ambition was "to be a law professor again, and to get away from this frenzied pace of life." But he did not hesitate, he said, when Leonard Garment, President Nixon's counsel, summoned him for help on the constitutional issues involved in the Watergate case. "I believe in the President, and I believe in the Presidency," he said. "I'm in this case because I believe in it."