

Rowland Evans and Robert Novak

Audits for Lawrence O'Brien

Immediately after Lawrence F. O'Brien filed his Watergate suit as Democratic national chairman, President Nixon's senior aides developed an obsessive interest in causing tax troubles for him.

According to reliable sources from the White House, O'Brien became Enemy No. 1 there after the Watergate burglary. It was O'Brien who then led the political attack to connect the crime with President Nixon's high command. Fearful about what might be uncovered through O'Brien's lawsuit against the Committee for the Re-Election of the President, Nixon aides responded by planning a counterattack against him.

The Senate Watergate hearings have revealed that the White House probed private sources of income for O'Brien, unpaid as national chairman. But the hearings did not develop that presidential aides conferred at length about intensifying Internal Revenue Service (IRS) pressure on O'Brien. This pressure was reflected in memoranda which may still be in White House files.

O'Brien's tax troubles began after his election on March 5, 1970, for a sec-

ond hitch as Democratic national chairman. The IRS ordered an audit of his 1969 tax return. In 1971, the IRS audited his 1970 return. Neither audit produced significant additional revenue for the government. But after the Watergate suit was filed, the IRS ordered a re-audit of his 1969 tax return—again, without significant recapture of taxes.

O'Brien's accountant, an experienced tax practitioner, informed him the audits were conducted with unprecedented intensity. But non-biased tax experts believe it will be very difficult to positively link the IRS audits with the White House obsession to get O'Brien.

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The continued isolation of President Nixon from the outside world, perhaps more intense than ever since the Watergate scandal broke, unnecessarily prolonged a dangerous vacuum of U.S. leadership in Vietnam.

That vacuum began last March when Graham Martin, U.S. ambassador to Italy, was named to replace Ellsworth Bunker as ambassador to South Vietnam. Bunker, completing a long and

distinguished tenure in Saigon, thus became a lame duck at a critical moment in Vietnam. He left his post May 11, but a slow-moving Senate did not confirm Martin as his successor until June 14—extending the vacuum another full month.

Martin was prepared to leave for his new post immediately after conferring with Mr. Nixon. But Martin, like many officials before him with a similarly important need to see the President, simply could not obtain an appointment. After cooling his heels in Washington for a full month, Martin finally was granted an appointment with Mr. Nixon for Thursday, July 12.

But on July 12, the President was hospitalized with viral pneumonia. Martin left Washington July 15, without the benefit of having conferred with Mr. Nixon, arriving in Saigon July 17 to finally end the vacuum.

In the view of worried U.S. officials in Vietnam, the absence of a permanent ambassador in Saigon contributed to an absence of U.S. policy at a time when the Communists were skillfully using the cease-fire to improve their military position and

develop a "third Vietnam" within the borders of South Vietnam.

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Former Gov. John B. Connally of Texas has quietly embarked on a path many close friends predicted he would never take: the rubber chicken banquet circuit to establish his new credentials as a Republican—possibly a Republican presidential candidate.

Connally gave state Republican headquarters in Austin the green light about a month ago to start scheduling appearances for him across the country. Out of hundreds of requests pouring into Austin (as many as 60 in one week), Connally has accepted two so far: the kickoff banquet of the Republican state convention in San Diego, Calif., Sept. 8, and the annual Trunk and Tusk Republican dinner in Phoenix, Ariz., Sept. 16.

Such appearances are essential for ex-Democrat Connally to melt the reserve of Republican regulars if he is to have any chance for the GOP presidential nomination in 1976. But many veteran Connally-watchers felt his distaste for grubby campaigning would preclude such a necessary course.

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