

The Kingmakers

The Selling
Of Connally

By Vera Glaser
and Malvina Stephenson

Washington

A quartet of public relations specialists now form the inner circle around Big John Connally, the new Republican star.

They are quietly setting the stage as the former Texas governor, treasury secretary and onetime Democrat takes a leading role in the GOP.

In political jargon, they'll be tagged the Connally Mafia if their man hits the jackpot as president, or sooner as vice president, should Spiro Agnew step down.

A preview of the style of Connally's kingmakers came through in telephone interviews.

Depending on Connally's political fate, these men will form the nucleus of his campaign organization or a new "palace guard."

They are James W. Donley of New York, Michael R. (Mickey) Gardner of Washington, D.C., Julian Reed and George Christian of Dallas and Austin, Texas, respectively.

With nearly 40 speaking invitations a week flooding in, the quartet is helping with Connally's coast-to-coast exposure tour.

"He's not running for anything," Christian insisted.

But when Donley was asked why Connally is taking soundings if he's not eyeing the presidency, he replied, "I would be silly if I denied there was something to that."

By early November, when Connally is expected to go abroad, he will have strutted his stuff in New York, Kansas, Oklahoma and Florida — and turned on charm for druggists, lawyers, farmers, businessmen, women bank-

ers and gas executives.

Thanks to his personality and/or the work of his "mafia," the Texan is, according to a recent poll, the leading choice to fill Agnew's shoes, if a vacancy develops.

The Connally quartet say they are not being paid, that they pick up their own travel tabs, that their operation is "loose," "unstructured" and "just an act of friendship."

They do not deny Nellie Connally has little taste for the White House, but tagged her "a good soldier, who will go along with what John wants."

James Donley, 38, is an international finance expert who was Connally's top press adviser at the treasury and now heads a firm serving prestigious Wall Street clients.

Donley, a Republican, rides herd on Connally's eastern appearances and writes material he says Connally "never uses."

Christian, the only member of the group who has had national exposure, "more or less" covers the West. He was press secretary to Connally in the Tex-

Texan John Connally seems a popular choice to fill Spiro Agnew's shoes



as statehouse and later to President Lyndon Johnson. He worked with Connally in 1972 on Democrats for Nixon and remains a Democrat.

Julian Reed's friendship with Connally dates back for years. He calls the present arrangement "no big formal deal, nothing rigid. It comes down to which of us has time to help at a particular moment." He generally operates in the Midwest and calls himself "a nominal Democrat."

Philadelphia - born Mickey Gardner, 31, is an "independent" who once worked for Eunice and Sargent Shriver. After Democrats for Nixon, he was impressed with Connally. Now he sets up news conferences and other arrangements in Washington.

Connally, in Gardner's glowing terms, "needs no entourage . . . We've traveled back and forth to Dulles airport in my broken-down station wagon more times than I can count."