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Connally
Sidestepped
Nomination

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President Nixon came very close to nominating John B. Connally, former governor of Texas and former Secretary of the Treasury, to be Vice President but was discouraged by Connally himself.

The Texan, a one-time protege of the late President Johnson, was the only one of five persons seriously considered for the nomination who was told in advance that the choice would be House Minority Leader Gerald R. Ford of Michigan, it was learned yesterday from sources in and out of the government.

Mr. Nixon spoke to none of the potential candidates personally before deciding on Ford, but he instructed Alexander M. Haig Jr., White House chief of staff, to telephone Connally on Thursday and again on Friday.

In announcing Friday noon that Mr. Nixon had made his decision and would announce it at 9 p.m. Friday, White House press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler said that the President had narrowed his list of possible nominees to five men when he flew to Camp David, Md., Thursday afternoon.

Actually, there were only four men on the list when the President went to Camp David, for one of them, Attorney General Elliot L. Richardson, had been eliminated by both Richardson and the President. Richardson's name had figured prominently in the President's deliberations at an earlier stage.

The four remaining on the list Thursday, 24 hours after Spiro T. Agnew resigned, were Ford, Connally, Gov. Nelson A. Rockefeller of New York and Gov. Ronald Reagan of California.

There had been many other suggestions from party leaders, members of the Cabinet and members of Congress, but Mr. Nixon had been thinking about the problem for some time and had narrowed the list to the four.

When Haig informed Connally on Thursday that he had very strong support for

See **SUCCEED, A10, Col. 6**

SUCCEED, From A1

the nomination, Connally raised his first objections.

The Texan discussed the pros and cons at some length and referred to the strong opposition that had been expressed to his nomination from both Democrats and Republicans on Capitol Hill.

Some congressional Democrats were convinced that they had the votes to block his confirmation should Mr. Nixon submit the Texan's name to succeed Agnew, a view not shared by the White House.

The President and others in the administration were convinced that any responsible nominee would be confirmed because members of Congress would realize that the voters wanted the issue resolved quickly so that there would be a Vice President in office.

But there was particularly vigorous opposition to Connally because he had

changed parties this year, because he was regarded as a formidable candidate for President in 1976, and because neither Republicans nor Democrats wanted Mr. Nixon to try to dictate the name of his successor.

"Connally dodged a bullet," one person fully informed as to Connally's thinking said yesterday. By dodging a bullet now, he remains a formidable potential candidate for President in 1976 without having gone through a wounding confirmation fight.

Also, if Mr. Nixon's stock continues to fall anyone with his endorsement might be hurt, and the scars of a confirmation battle might have been permanent.

Nevertheless, Haig told Connally Thursday that he had strong support across the board for the nomination. Connally was "keenly aware of some of the problems," one reliable source said. But, as Connally said, "I did not receive an offer

and I did not turn one down."

On Friday morning, after Mr. Nixon made his decision, Haig telephoned Connally again and told him that the President would nominate Ford.

Connally said in Texas that he had been in contact with the White House Friday. "I called and was called," he said. He did not say with whom he talked.

"I am sure he will do honor to the office of the vice presidency," Connally told reporters when Mr. Nixon announced Ford's nomination. "I support the President's choice . . . with enthusiasm."

After Mr. Nixon returned from Camp David early Friday, he informed his staff that he had made a decision and he scheduled separate meetings with Ford and Senate Minority Leader Hugh Scott (R-Pa.).

Mr. Nixon did not tell Scott whom he had decided upon and he only told Ford that he was under consideration and that the person to be nominated would receive a telephone call from Haig.

Ford was at his home when Haig telephoned the news about 7:30 p.m. Friday, an hour and a half before the Nixon announcement in the East Room.

In Floresville, Tex., Mrs. Connally said she was glad the offer was never made to her husband.

"I couldn't be happier," she said. "I'm delighted mainly because I'll have John at home. I'm just glad it's all settled."