

# Connally Dines With Ford as Both Republican Factions Woo Him

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John B. Connally was far back in the group when 16 members of President Ford's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board emerged from the White House today to take the oath of office in a Rose Garden ceremony.

But with the timing of the instinctive politician, Mr. Connally loped through to get to the head of this pack of dignitaries. By the time television and still photographers began oper-

ating, he had positioned himself in the most opportune spot, close to the President and Leo Cherne, chairman of the advisory board.

Mr. Connally's political timing is a matter of considerable interest, to the President and to Ronald Reagan, Mr. Ford's rival for the Republican Presidential nomination.

An endorsement of either candidate by the former Secretary of the Treasury could, in the judgment of the Ford and Reagan camps, determine the outcome of the May 1 pri-

mary in Texas, where a volatile Republican electorate can doom Mr. Reagan's challenge or weaken Mr. Ford's candidacy.

Thus, exactly one year after he went on trial in Federal District Court here on bribery charges of which he was found not guilty, Mr. Connally was back at the focal point of National Republican politics.

Mr. Ford would wooed him tonight at a private dinner in the White House. Mr. Reagan reportedly telephoned Mr. Connally to make one. Mr. Connally, characteristically, kept both sides guessing.

### Opposing Calls Noted

"I don't honestly know what he'll do," one well-placed Ford campaign member said today of Mr. Connally. "First a so-called 'closest personal friend' of John Connally' will call and tell me he's going to endorse us, then another 'closest friend' will call and tell me he won't."

John P. Sears, the Reagan campaign manager, told reporters yesterday that he knew of no one who could predict Connally's actions. "Connally is a player," Mr. Sears said, "he's a player at all times."

"I would not be surprised," Mr. Sears added, "if before the Texas primary he endorsed somebody. But I would not predict who it would be."

Mr. Connally has been coy, publicly as well as privately. He told one interviewer recently that it could "do harm" to his effort to enlarge the Republican Congressional minority if he were to involve himself in the fight for the Presidential nomination. At the White House that statement was regarded as a plus for Mr. Reagan.

But Mr. Connally also has said he expects Mr. Ford to win the party's nomination, a

remark the Reagan camp considers modestly helpful to the President.

Texas looms as a crucial primary, Mr. Sears said, so Mr. Connally to use his "influence rather than dissuade it by not using it at all."

Some Ford aides have begun dropping Mr. Connally's name as a potential Vice-Presidential nominee, especially if Jimmy Carter, former Governor of Georgia, wins the Democratic Presidential nomination, and Mr. Ford needs someone such as Mr. Connally to appeal to the South in November.

"We need Connally—we need him nationally," Stuart Spencer, Mr. Ford's deputy campaign chairman, said today. Another Ford intimate said

that the President had been urged to suggest that Mr. Connally could even become a de facto partner of Rogers C. B. Morton, Mr. Ford's campaign chairman, in designing and directing the President's candidacy.

"Ford and Connally need each other," the aide said. "The best chance for the Republicans to have an Administration next year is with Gerald Ford, not Ronald Reagan. Connally wants to remain a public person."

The aide let the sentence trail off. The unspoken implication seemed clear—that Mr. Connally's prospects for a return to national prominence may lie with the President who reinstated him today to membership on the Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board.