

Connally Is Arousing Speculation Over His Future

By JAMES P. STERBA
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HOUSTON, April 26—"We don't understand how affluent and abundant we really are. We use more energy for air-conditioning alone in the United States than 800 million mainland Chinese for all purposes. That's the kind of perspective we need in this country."

And that is the kind of perspective John B. Connally has been dispensing for several months now at the rate of three speeches a week. Using "an absolutely irresponsible Congress" as his target, he has roamed the country urging national sacrifice on energy, warning of new Soviet expansionism and calling for leadership in handling critical world economic imbalances.

Although he is expected to play a campaign role this fall, he has avoided endorsing either President Ford or Ronald Reagan in this Saturday's Texas primary, despite enticements from both camps. Instead, he talks and acts like a man who is building a camp of his own.

At 59 years old, Mr. Connally sounds as if he has set out to build a future for the Republican Party, the country and himself—not necessarily in that order. He talks about the "new agenda for the future." Like Nelson A. Rockefeller's Commission on Critical Choices, Mr. Connally has an outfit called Vital Issues of America.

Major Problems Overcome

His staying power is unquestioned. Both he and President Kennedy were shot in that car in Dallas. He survived. Both he and President Nixon faced demise in Watergate. He was acquitted. He remains the most popular man in Texas among both Republicans and Democrats. Last August, after his acquittal on bribery charges, he threw a Houston dinner for himself and raised \$250,000 to spend as he chose.

Since then he has been metaphorically paying his dues to the Republican Party to which he defected in 1973 after being a lifelong Democrat. Dealing directly with state Republican parties, he has vowed to help them elect Republicans to Congress and proved it by speaking at a dozen state fund-raisers so far this year. He even pays his own expenses. With President Ford and Ronald Reagan preoccupied with their own races, Mr. Connally has become the best money-maker local Republicans have.

'Demagoguery' in Congress

Although he says, "I'm a newcomer, and the Republican Party doesn't exactly greet us with open arms," Mr. Connally has been earnestly wooing state and local party leaders with rousing pep talks and heavy oratory.

"We can't just talk about being Republicans and get elected," he tells them. "We repre-

sent just 21 percent of the people, and unless we can appeal to those who call themselves independents and even Democrats, we're not going to get elected to anything."

"And we, least of all, want to be the advocates of the status quo. That's going to kill us and everyone else, because we're involved in one of the

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as He Roams Country in Support

of the Republicans

great transitional changes in this society's history."

He blames Congress for foot-dragging on energy, saying:

"They're doing it so they can go to their constituencies and promise them cheap gasoline. What they're really saying is that they're delivering the most powerful nation in the world into the hands of small nations who can shut down this industrial base any time they want to. They're taking a short-range, short-sighted, very selfish political view saying they're going to take care of these bloated oil companies and give people cheap gasoline. And that's cheap demagoguery of the worst kind."

"I can even defend the major oil companies if you want me to take on that battle in your state," he told Republican leaders gathered at his Floresville ranch last month. "They've put up the risk capital, explored, found, developed, refined, transported and retailed at the pump fuel cheaper than any other civilization in the world."

He defends corporations and profits, saying, "When you have polls showing that the majority of college graduates think corporations had a profit margin of 40 percent of their gross sales, something's wrong. It's about 4.5 percent. Can you believe that college graduates have no better understanding

of the free enterprise system than that?"

For months Mr. Connally has been arguing that foreign policy, not domestic issues, will dominate this election campaign. And in this area, he is most earnest and sounds more like Mr. Reagan than President Ford—although he blames Congress for destroying the ability of the executive branch to make and conduct foreign policy.

Soviet Moves Foreseen

"We're going to see, in my judgment, the most aggressive Soviet moves we've seen since the cold war," he says. "Because they perceive the current

weakness of the United States."

The picture he paints is grim. If the Communists win elections in the Italian province of Rome this summer, allowing them to portray Roman Catholicism and Communism as co-existing, "you're going to see an all-out Communist offensive in the nations of the Catholic world—Mexico, Central and South America, western France, with continuations in Spain and Portugal."

Mr. Connally, who was appointed by President Ford last month to the Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, says that in addition, a war is brewing between Algeria and Morocco that "could be a very dis-

turbing situation this year." All these movements mean, he says, that the United States could be pushed out of the Mediterranean, destroying the underbelly of the NATO Alliance and isolating Greece, Turkey, and, especially, Israel, "which is already isolated in a world of animosity."

Fearful of Depression

"Where, then, is the protection for the Middle-East oil that fuels the industrial nations of the world?" he asks rhetorically. "It's helpless."

Two supertankers sunk in the narrow straits between Iran and Omar could block the flow of Persian Gulf oil for 18

months except for what little travels through pipelines," he says.

"It will immobilize the industrial world" he says. "It will throw Japan into chaos almost overnight. It will mean a worldwide depression of enormous proportions, and it will have a profound effect here."

"Instead of playing politics with the defense and energy policies of this nation, we ought to be mining coal in unprecedented quantities, building nuclear generating plants, and doing everything else we possibly can to be self-sufficient as fast as we can. Time is running out."

Mr. Connally appears to be

casting about for a role that will keep him in the national public eye during the next four years. Friends say he would like to be Secretary of State and that he could tolerate being Vice President. They also say he cannot stay home in Texas for four more years and hope to have much of a chance at being elected President in 1980. He plans to make an announcement in Washington next Monday, two days after the Texas primary, but he will not say what about. He insists it will not have anything to do with politics. But everyone who knows him doubts that Mr. Connally can do anything that is not eventually political.