

Connally's Bitter Charge

Washington

Former Texas Governor John Connally charged yesterday that critics are trying to keep him off the Republican ticket as President Ford's running mate by resurrecting his 1975 trial on Watergate-related bribery charges, of which he was eventually acquitted.

Connally, launching a counterattack of his own, accused the critics of "a vicious, malicious distortion of the truth" and warned that he intends to carry the argument to them between now and the convention.

He specifically named columnist Jack Anderson and Representative Paul Findley (Rep.-Ill.) as targets of his counterattack. Reference by Anderson on ABC's "AM America" television show of "a missing two minutes of tape" in the bribery case is "a total distortion of the facts," he said.

While calling his availability for the GOP vice-presidential nomination still "highly questionable," Connally said the Republican ticket must go on the attack against the Democrats to win, and that he plans to be part of that attack "on or off the ticket."

The former Secretary of the Treasury said he was "offended and outraged" at the references to his legal difficulties, in which he was charged with accepting a dairy industry bribe for persuading former President Nixon to increase milk price supports.

"I think I went through enough," Connally said in a telephone interview. "My family, my children, suffered enough." He said he believed he could turn the attacks to his own advantage because they are unfair.

"You better believe I'm going on the attack about it," Connally said. "I've been waiting for them," he said of his critics. "They've gotten out on a limb now."

Meanwhile, two Republican members of the House Judiciary Committee that heard Watergate evidence in the Nixon impeachment trial confirmed they have urged Mr. Ford to review all Watergate testimony and tapes regarding Connally before choosing a running mate.

Representative Tom Railsback (Rep.-Ill.) and William Cohen (Rep.-Me.) said they have told White House aides tapes concerning conversations leading to the raising of milk price supports and subsequent campaign contributions by the dairy industry should be carefully checked.

Washington Post