

# Von Hoffman

## Connally at the Bat

Washington

"EVERY CABINET should have at least one potential president in it," Richard Nixon is supposed to have said while meditating on offering the Treasury to John Connally. He was but the first of many Republicans who saw a potential in Connally that escaped the leaders of the Democratic party of which the former Texas governor had been a member until 1972.

What is there about Connally? He had Nixon ga-ga: "Only three men in America understand the use of power. I do. John Connally does. And I guess Nelson does."



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Like Rockefeller, Connally exudes a take-charge confidence that Republicans must mistake as a certain outward sign of competence. It's a kind of musk some men give off, an odor suggestive of men of destiny or maybe captains of industry. Whatever it is,

Republicans are more drawn to the odor just now than Democrats and thus return to sniff at the likes of a Connally, ignoring the more substantial claims of less gamy persons like Secretary of the Treasury William Simon. Not only has Simon kept Jerry Ford, that ward of the national state, from doing foolish and erratic things, but he has shown himself to be a thoughtful, consistent and competent conservative, which, you'd think, might be attractive to Republicans.

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NOT A BIT of it. They like Charisma Connally and they like him so well that they'll accept things from him that would set them off trying to lynch Rockefeller again. Connally, whom you will recall was the major Administration spokesman for the Lockheed loan, is just as firm a believer in using the public credit to back private enterprise as Rockefeller ever has been.

William Safire, the columnist who was a White House staffer in the first Nixon Administration, writes: "Connally, as a successful politician turned businessman, had an insight to contribute to Nixon: that the businessman of today was a far cry from the entrepreneur of old who resented government interference. Most business managers, Connally understood, were ready to trade away too much economic freedom for stable labor demands, figuring 'uncertainty' to be worse for business than government controls ... Connally taught him where the hidden business support was for the step he hated to take." That step, of course, was wage and price controls.

Connally seems imbued with the rootless, overly pragmatic and intrusively energetic eclecticism of a big business, Rooseveltian Democrat. It is exactly those qualities that put off the small business, work ethics-types in the Republican party when they see Nelson Rockefeller. For some reason Connally doesn't bother them, perhaps because he's advocated a constitutional amendment to prohibit school busing for racial balance. You have to wonder about taking Connally seriously on such topics. He tosses off suggested constitutional amendments the way other politicians propose municipal ordinances. They range from single, six-year terms for presidents to a quixotic amendment that members of Congress be required to spend three months out of every 12 in their home districts staying in touch with their constituents.

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HE BACKED the Nixon-Moynihan guaranteed income legislative effort and has even flirted with something called the National Dividend Plan. This involves yet another constitutional amendment, one that would put a 50 per cent ceiling on the corporate income tax. The money collected wouldn't be retained by the Treasury but would be divided up and distributed to each registered voter.

His history makes clear who he is but not what kind of conservatism he has been made to stand for. It's not the Whig tradition of small, free market enterprise and less government. Indeed, if a John Connally is now a true expression of conservatism, then there is a New Conservative to match the New Liberal.

That is our Silver Meteor, or should we rest with President Nixon's summation of Jawing Jawn: "I brought him up from the Texas League. Sometimes he singles, sometimes he doubles, and often gets a home run. Furthermore when a ball comes at his head, he knows how to duck."