

EVER SINCE a brief talk we had just after the assassination of Robert Kennedy, I have been convinced that Ted Kennedy would not soon seek the presidency. But conditions change, particularly given the nature of the current Democratic race.

So to bring myself abreast of his present outlook, I went to see Sen. Kennedy the other day at his home in the Washington suburbs. I came away more than ever convinced that he was determined not to run for either president or vice president, and that if it were up to him he would tip the nomination to George McGovern.

As usual with the Kennedys, the talk began with ironic kidding. It was a beautiful spring morning and I remarked that it was nice to hear the birds — when the passing planes didn't drown out their song.

He said: "I've come to like one of those jets. The 7 o'clock from Los Angeles. It wakes me every morning."

I mentioned to him our conversation back in 1968, and my strong impression that he did not want to run for the presidency. I asked him whether that impression was still correct.

He said: "That's right." He ran over the various reasons. He spoke of his family responsibilities. He alluded indirectly to the dangers of another assassination attempt. He said: "There ought to be at least eight years between me and the era of my brothers."

I asked him about running as vice president with either McGovern or Hubert Humphrey. He began rambling about the Senate. He said there were important opportunities for service there, and that they would grow as he gained seniority and moved up the ladder in the important committees. I took that to mean that he wanted no part of actually being vice president—of serving in the second spot, of doing what amounted to station breaks in Fort Wayne.

I asked him about reports, emanating from those in touch with the Humphrey camp, of a possible arrangement whereby Sen. Kennedy would be guaranteed the

nomination in 1976 if he took the No. 2 position this year. He said that was unthinkable, that the American people would never accept such a deal and would rightly reject anybody who was party to it.

I put to him another theory widely circulated in Washington. Namely, that by running as vice president he could bring to the surface and then bury once and for all the Chappaquiddick issue. Even if he lost, he would have, so to speak, gone through customs.

He shook his head. "If we lost," he said, "they'd blame me. Then you'd never hear the end of it."

I asked him what role he expected to play in the Democratic nomination. He said:

"I fixed my course some time ago. My course is not to endorse anybody until after the convention. The only thing that would change that is if it looked as though George Wallace were going to get the nomination. Then I'd do something. But even then I'm not thinking in terms of myself as a candidate."

I mentioned the Humphrey campaign. Kennedy thought Humphrey would have trouble beating McGovern in California and New York. He expressed doubt that Humphrey has, as many believe, the support of the men who lead the party organization.

He said that Humphrey had "tattooed" Mayor Richard Daley of Chicago in comments on the riots there at the 1968 convention. He did not think Mayor Daley would find it easy to support Humphrey.

I mentioned the McGovern campaign. Kennedy was plainly in close touch with the McGovern people. He thought they would go into the convention at Miami Beach with about 1,260 votes of the 1,509 necessary for nomination. He thought that would be enough to push through.

I put to him one of the cases made against McGovern—the argument that he is a naive provincial who without even knowing it takes up harebrained positions on such weighty mat-

ters as the defense budget or the tax system.

Kennedy shook his head. He said: "No, that's wrong. When you go to McGovern with something, he listens. He learns."

Kennedy had an appointment for a speech in town, and he invited me to drive in with him and his chauffeur. He also took along two of his young children, Kara Ann and Patrick.

At the hotel where he was speaking, he and the children got out; he asked the chauffeur to take me further on. The chauffeur looked dubiously at the senator and his two children. "Don't worry," Kennedy said to him. "I'll handle the kids."

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## Ted Kennedy's Role