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Kennedy May Visit Cuba; Opening to U.S. Seen

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HAVANA—Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) is expected to visit Cuba for talks with Prime Minister Fidel Castro some time later this year, according to reliable sources here.

According to one source, Sen. Kennedy has been making efforts to come to Cuba "for close to two years and friends of Kennedy have come here to put out feelers on several previous occasions."

Two Kennedy aides, Mark Schneider and Robert Hunter, were in Cuba from last Dec. 28 until Jan. 3, and met with Castro and other Cuban officials. Their visit was not mentioned in the Cuban press or radio and some officials denied that they had been here.

(Kennedy's office in Washington said Schneider and Hunter were in Cuba as representatives of the Senate subcommittee on refugees, which Kennedy heads, to discuss humanitarian problems such as separated Cuban families and the problems of political prisoners. The office said Kennedy had been interested in visiting several Latin American countries, including Cuba, for several years, but had no definite plans for a visit to Cuba. A Kennedy aide denied that any feelers had been put out by friends of Kennedy visiting Cuba.)

Havana's apparent willingness to receive Kennedy now, reflects its growing interest in establishing contacts with the United States, an attitude confirmed by Castro during an impromptu press conference with a small group of Mexican and other foreign reporters here Thursday.

"We have always had some visitors from the United States, such as congressmen,

economists, workers, students, young Americans," Castro said. "But I can assure you that in different U.S. circles there is a growing interest in Cuba and we receive this with pleasure, of course."

Well-placed sources here observed that the recent trip by Sens. Jacob Javits (R-N.Y.) and Claiborne Pell (D-R.I.) was "only the beginning" of a series of ranking U.S. government visitors. "It appears that Kennedy will be next, although there are other, even more important people in the United States who have indicated they want to come here" a source added.

The source would not reveal the identity of these "more important" prospective visitors. "We will have to see how they suit the Cuban government," the source replied.

Further evidence of Cuban interest in some economic links with the United States was offered by Castro in a speech last month in which, for the first time, he brought up the possibility of exporting Cuban sugar to the United States.

Asked Thursday when Cuba might begin selling its sugar to the United States, Castro replied with a smile: "Starting tomorrow. We are right in the middle of the harvest. If the U.S. needs sugar, we'll sell it because we have no law forbidding the sale of sugar to the United States. We have not decreed any blockade against the U.S."

Castro said, however, that he did not see such sales as "a real and immediate possibility." He added that the United States "is paying too high a price for sugar to continue practicing this sport of having blockade. After all, we are U.S. problem."

"Even though we can do it as soon as tomorrow, we can

also wait 10 years . . . for Cuban sugar always has a market, to the last ton."

The Soviet Union has a long-standing contract to buy Cuban sugar at about 20 cents a pound. In recent months, Moscow has been increasingly lenient in allowing Havana to sell its sugar on the world market, where prices have been fluctuating between 45 and 60 cents a pound.

Calculations based on an average price of 50 cents a pound, have led economists here to expect that Cuba's sugar profits for this year may reach \$2 billion.

At Thursday's meeting with reporters, Castro appeared very relaxed and emanated a strong sense of confidence in Cuba's economic and political future. The session with a handful of correspondents was described here as "most unusual." It began at midnight, after a reception for Maria Esther Echeverria, wife of the Mexican president. She headed a large Mexican cultural mission here.

Until 2 a.m., a good-humored Castro talked about Sino-Soviet tensions, the recession and inflation in capitalist countries, and his own role in Cuba's national elections planned for next year.

"I'll do what the party congress determines; I've had many years in this revolutionary work," he said. "I aspire to nothing, but, if anything, I would like to have time to read and study a great deal."

Castro also condemned the recently adopted U.S. trade act, calling it a "disappointment, spiced with elements of discrimination."

"It does not affect us," Castro added, "but I think that now many countries will better understand the meaning of the economic blockade against Cuba."