

## Joseph Alsop

### Kennedy Balks at '72, Upgrades Nixon, Sees Reactionary Winds Blowing Strong

WASHINGTON—Contrary to universal belief, most strongly held in the White House itself, Sen. Edward Kennedy is not aiming for the Democratic nomination in 1972; and he is even doubtful whether he will ever do so.

This is emphatically not due to a momentary lack of appetite for the political contest, which so naturally overcame Edward Kennedy after Robert Kennedy was so tragically lost to the nation. It is due, rather, to a sharply revised judgment of President Nixon, plus a pretty gloomy judgment of the probable political tendency of this country in the next four years.

In the opening phases of the Nixon administration, Sen. Kennedy made the same misjudgment of the new President that most other Democrats made.

In politics, the habits of one period always carry over into the next period. Furthermore, the first two really hermetic months of the Nixon administration rather strongly suggested that the President would be another nonleader in the White House.

The first sign that Mr. Nixon as President could be just as tough a political fighter as he was in the old days came in Alaska when the two Republican senators made their well-publicized, preplanned withdrawal from Sen. Kennedy's visit-the-Eskimos circus.

"We lost a bit of skin on that one," a leading member of the senator's staff has said.

Yet a more important factor in the revised judgment of Mr. Nixon is the unexpected decision by the President to take the public lead in the antibalistic - missile - system fight before it comes to a vote in the Senate.

Kennedy is well aware that it is seldom a paying proposition to argue about the nation's security with an aggressive President.



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That is why he has so obviously retired from the front rank of the anti-ABM forces. He will have to come forward again, willy-nilly, when he gets the report on the subject that he dramatically commissioned from Dr. Jerome Weisner and Prof. Abraham Chayes. But that will be about the end of it, of course excepting behind-the-scenes work before the vote itself.

At bottom, however, the senator's judgment of future political tendencies has had far more influence on him — thus his upgrading of Richard Nixon

on to the status of a really formidable opponent. Here Kennedy's problem is his association in the public mind, mainly as a rub-off from his brother Robert, who really did have such associations — with new left and the black militants.

One may guess that he groans aloud each morning when he sees that day's front page with its now-customary news of this or that university campus in a state of unpardonable disruption because of Students for a Democratic Society and black militant uproars.

If the President and his allies can just hang the SDS and militants around the senator's neck, like a ghastly string of catapots, Kennedy will have in all but insoluble problem on his hands.

The country's anger with the SDS-black militant goes on rising so rapidly that it is now reaching a near - apoplectic stage. It is not limited to middle-class whites, either.

If you go among mature, employed Negroes, who are the great majority, you find most of them boiling with rage because the young blacks, at Harvard and elsewhere, are making such ducks and drakes of the golden opportunities they themselves were so unjustly never granted.

In these circumstances, the attractions of the 1972 race for Sen. Kennedy can only be described as minimal. He is young. Besides his great name, he has great abilities and a remarkable political gift. Strategically, it may well be better for him to let the country get reaction out of its system and then to point to a new and more inspiring goal in 1976.

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