

## Joseph Alsop

## Kennedy's Spirit of '76

WASHINGTON — The signs are daily growing stronger that, contrary to the almost universal expectation, Sen. Edward Kennedy is not aiming to run for the presidency in 1972.

"The spirit of '76" is the watchword, quite clearly.

There are two reasons for this. The young senator still needs time to recover the needed zest for the rough and tumble of political combat. More importantly, however, it is evident that Sen. Kennedy is increasingly persuaded, with every day that passes, that 1972 is going to be a rotten time to run.

This is the real reason for the warnings issuing from the senator's office in a scarcely veiled manner, that President Nixon has turned out to be an unexpectedly tough political customer; that the trends favor the President; that the Democrats are in for some painfully rough going in the years immediately ahead.

There can be no doubt at all that these warnings are the real thing, directly reflecting the senator's own thoughts.

One might suspect the kind of tactical maneuver that is common with intending candidates. But that suspicion has to be discarded simply because the senator's actions are in accord with his words.

As previously pointed out in this space, Kennedy has been shrewdly conducting a quiet withdrawal from the limelight,

which shone upon him with such a fearsome glare only a few months ago.

Even on the Vietnamese war, he said his say very quiet-



JOSEPH ALSOP

ly and coolly in his speech at Fordham University.

And he can now be expected to let others do the talking — which, of course, they will, at the top of their voices.

What is really interesting, meanwhile, is to know the calculations that have led Kennedy to adopt a course so utterly different from the one generally predicted for him. Here one is in the realm of speculation, yet it is possible to speculate with great confidence of hitting the target correctly.

First, the youngest Kennedy is quite shrewd enough to see that all too many of the liberal slogans and shibboleths, plans and prescriptions of the last 10

years have been distinctly counterproductive.

Given his constituency, he cannot say this. But being a realist — as he is — he must be far from unwilling to have President Nixon effect a general clearance before the time comes for a new start. Realism bulks large, in fact, in "the spirit of '76."

Second, there is the senator's rather obvious dissent from the common run of political calculations in this henhouse of a city.

The cackle of the henhouse is that Vietnam is more important than anything else. The Los Angeles and Minneapolis elections and the New York primary say, instead, that the middling voters are far more worried about black militants and student extremists than about the war.

Third, there are small signs that suggest a certain disenchantment with the louder voices of American liberalism's existing establishment. Sen. Robert Kennedy sometimes allowed these people to infest him to the point of making one think of Edward Lear's limerick:

There was an old man with a beard,

Who said, "It is just as I feared!

Two owls and a hen,  
Four larks and a wren  
Have all built their nests in my beard."

But the noninfestation of Edward Kennedy is almost as conspicuous, at the moment, as the infestation of his tragically lost brother occasionally became in the old days.

Speaking very seriously, moreover, any practical person who cares much for the things that President John Kennedy and Sen. Robert Kennedy cared for can see that Sen. Edward Kennedy will have a major task to perform — in 1976.