

Kennedy's Defeat as Senate Democratic Whip Linked to Drop in Presidential Prospects

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 21—In the last decade, the ebb and flow of Senatorial power has become more intimately related to Presidential politics.

That was demonstrated again today when Senator Edward M. Kennedy of Massachusetts was deposed as majority whip—an event that resulted in part from

the Presidential politics of two years ago and that will certainly influence those of two years hence.

Mr. Kennedy was not beaten because of ideology. Few Senators would argue with the judgment, expressed privately by a Northern liberal, that "The Senate is far more liberal than Bobby Byrd, but Kennedy as whip did nothing for anybody, and Byrd always managed to do something for everybody."

Pre-Chappaquiddick Power

The point is that two years ago, when Senator Kennedy won the job, such considerations were secondary. In January, 1969, he seemed the inevitable choice to lead the Democrats out of the Nixon wilderness in 1972; he was the crown prince, a probable President, a man who could help or hurt his fellow Democratic Senators as he saw fit, even in their home states.

At least some Senators voted for him at that time out of fear. The prudent politician does not casually earn the enmity of someone he thinks likely to be President and leader of his party in only two years.

Then in July of 1969 came the incident at Chappaquiddick Island, in which a car driven by Senator Kennedy plunged off a bridge into the water, and Mary Jo Kopechne was killed.

Not only did the Senator, in something of an emotional funk, all but ignore his duties as whip; he was also seen differently by his colleagues. By the time of today's votes, he had come back a long way from the first days after the accident, but he was not the leading Presidential candidate. Those who had reason to vote against him felt at liberty to do so.

If, as widely reported, Senators Henry M. Jackson and Warren G. Magnuson of Washington voted against Senator Kennedy, they may well have done so to penalize him for his vote against appropriations for the supersonic transport, a Seattle project. Two years ago, it would have been more diffi-

cult for them to take such a step.

The Senator's post-Chappaquiddick vulnerability—and the feeling that he was nonetheless still barely alive as a Presidential possibility for 1972—may have led some Senators to try to put him definitively out of the running by their nay votes today.

Ironically, the whip contest had never amounted to much until Senator Kennedy dramatized it by his successful challenge to Senator Russell B. Long of Louisiana.

To many Senators and to much of the Capitol Hill press corps, his defeat seemed to demolish whatever prospects Mr. Kennedy might have had to emerge from a deadlocked convention as his party's nominee in 1972. But the same thing was said after Chappaquiddick—a more striking event that captured and held public attention.

Muskie Ahead Now

Despite that tragedy and his repeated announcements that he would not run in 1972, Mr. Kennedy continued to occupy a prominent place in the speculations of politicians concerning 1972. A year from now, he may be "rehabilitated" again.

It will not happen unless the present front-runner, Senator Edmund S. Muskie of Maine, stumbles badly in the next 18 months. His current strength was demonstrated again in a Gallup Poll taken Jan. 9 and 10 and released today, which showed him running even, 44 per cent to 44 percent, with President Nixon.

The same poll showed Senator Kennedy training the President, 47 to 38, and Senator Hubert H. Humphrey trailing Mr. Nixon, 48 to 38. Gov. George C. Wallace of Alabama got 9 or 10 per cent in each of the three trial heats.

But the pressure may be telling, at least temporarily, on Mr. Muskie. At his news conference after returning from Europe and the Middle East on Monday, and again in an interview with Elizabeth Drew on educational television on Tuesday, he showed a surprising degree of testiness.

For example, Miss Drew

asked him a question that implied that he would be a Presidential candidate—a fact that he has conceded privately for many months. Senator Muskie bridled at the question.

"I'm a United States Senator," he said, "concerned with those issues, as I should be, but I will not at this point pitch them on the assumption that I'm a candidate for anything. When I want to become a candidate for anything, I think I can find the words that will make my intentions clear."

For the most liberal of the po-

tential Democratic candidates—Senator George S. McGovern of South Dakota, who has announced, and Senator Harold E. Hughes of Iowa, who has not—Mr. Kennedy's setback may prove helpful. Many of their natural constituents are Kennedy supporters who have been holding back, "waiting for Teddy."

Senator McGovern, in particular, has been troubled by intimations that he is nothing but a stalking horse for Mr. Kennedy. He should now hear that accusation less often.