

100 Threats a Year

The Fear Around Kennedy

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Each weekday afternoon Senator Edward M. Kennedy (Dem.-Mass.) makes an important telephone call to his home in suburban McLean, Va.

He talks to his son, Teddy Jr., about school and other things of interest to a 9-year-old boy.

Senator Kennedy is usually close to his elder son, but the daily telephone calls have another purpose:

Young Teddy Kennedy does not believe that his father, the last of the Kennedy brothers, will make it back home once he leaves the residence each day.

The daily telephone call is to reassure Teddy; Kara Anne, 10; Patrick Joseph, 3, and the Senator's wife, Joan. It is not an easy task for a man who also believes that he is stalked by death.

Warned

Seven years after President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, and nearly three years after Senator Robert F. Kennedy was murdered in Los Angeles, Senator Edward M. Kennedy

is warned frequently and in a variety of ways that he may be next to die.

The constant fear that "somebody out there" may be gunning for the Senator is a major factor among those close to Kennedy in any discussion of his political future, although Kennedy is determined that he will not be paralyzed by the possibility of assassination.

Next to the President and Vice President, Kennedy receives more threats than anyone in government.

It is also fair to say that he receives more attention from the secret service, FBI, capital police, metropolitan police and Fairfax county police than any other public official outside the White House.

Threats

Senator Kennedy does not have secret service protection. By law, he cannot. But the secret service does investigate threats to public officials on the basis that such persons are potential threats to the President and Vice President.

Kennedy was elected a Senator from Massachusetts in 1962. From 1964 to the

present, secret service was involved in 355 matters arising out of Kennedy threats.

Threats aren't the exclusive property of any single ideology. Former Minnesota Senator dove Eugene McCarthy had 99 secret service contacts — next highest to Kennedy — while hawk Barry Goldwater (Rep.-Ariz.) had 94.

Fulbright

Secret Service had 40 contacts with Senator J. William Fulbright (Dem.-Ark.), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and leading critic of U.S. involvement in Indochina.

In Kennedy's case, the Senator does not see the hate mail, which goes into a file cabinet in his outer office. His staff says the ebb and flow largely depends on events that propel Kennedy into the headlines.

Peaks came in 1964, when he almost died in a plane crash; in 1965 when he tried — and failed — to make Francis X. Morrissey a federal judge; in 1968 following the June murder of his brother Robert in California, and twice during 1969. Early in that year hate

mail followed his defeat of Senator Russell Long (Dem.-La.) for the post of Democratic whip, which he has since lost.

Then in July 1969, he drove off the bridge at Chappaquiddick Island, Mass., and a secretary, Mary Jo Kopeckne, was drowned. The volume of hate mail was enormous.

100 Times

At least 100 times a year, the mail includes a threat of death, kidnap or injury to Kennedy or members of his family.

When Kennedy travels in other states, he takes complex security precautions. These are based on briefings by the Secret Service and FBI and are provided to all public officials who have been seriously threatened.

Resident FBI agents are alerted when Kennedy is coming to a city, especially since January 2 when President Nixon signed into law a bill that includes a provision making it a federal crime to assassinate, kidnap or assault an elected or appointed federal official.

The measure itself has several ironical twists. First, it was sponsored by Senator Robert Byrd (Dem.-W. Va.), who dumped Edward Kennedy as whip last month. The bill grew out of the assassination of Robert F. Kennedy and the subsequent bizarre trial of Sirhan Sirhan in a California state court.

Death

Finally, it was opposed by Senator Edward Kennedy because it carries a mandatory death penalty provision.

Kennedy's actions last April, when he was invited to the first anniversary observance of the murder of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in Memphis provide an example of his security procedures.

He did not accept the public invitation to the ceremony nor did he accept the recommendation of his staff to pass up the appearance, although it appeared he did so.

Instead, he went on a holiday to Florida. Then, unannounced and unscheduled, he went to Memphis and participated.

He was following a Secret Service axiom that assassinations are not spontaneous but are planned.