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Nixon sees Kennedy as his opponent after Demo 'pygmies' fight it out

WASHINGTON — Down in the dust of the primaries the announced Democratic contenders struggle onward toward the next dreary vote. But President Richard M. Nixon has already concluded that his opponent in this year's election is going to be Sen. Edward Kennedy, who would not touch a primary with a 10-foot pole.

The problem of the Democratic nomination at Miami Beach is not the kind of topic on which the President ever makes pronouncements, except in the hearing of his highest and closest subordinates. But those highest and closest subordinates are talking so freely, all over town, that there can be no doubt they reflect the President.

"Of course, it's going to be Kennedy," one of them recently said. "What else do you expect? The Democratic party is up to its blank in pygmies; so the party is bound to turn to Kennedy in the end. And if the party turns to him, Kennedy is bound to go."

For political purposes, meanwhile, the important thing is that one may be certain President Nixon now expects the "pygmies" to fall by the wayside, and the third Kennedy brother to get the Democratic nomination. That raises three questions:

First, what is the President doing to prepare for a Nixon-Kennedy campaign? Here, the answer is that he has not a great deal he can do that he was not doing before. He has always expected the left wing of the Democratic party to block any nominee who really gives the left-wing ideologists the creeps.

With his stand on busing and in many

other ways, President Nixon is therefore seeking to take a permanent hold on the center and the right of center in American politics today.

The second question is simple: Will Sen. Kennedy follow the scenario President Nixon has laid out? The answer to this one is far more doubtful. Sen. Kennedy goes on telling everyone, "I haven't changed my views in the least; and I don't expect anything is going to change them." *

As to the straws in the wind of the senator's intentions, there are three main ones. Most importantly, he has been taking a series of far from centrist positions. He seems frozen in cement on the busing issue, for instance. Quite aside from the South, it is hard to see how a pro-busing candidate, pleasing to the ideology-mongers, can carry crucial states like Illinois and even Michigan.

If President Nixon is right about Sen. Kennedy, what kind of a campaign will it be? The answer to this one is a noisy, nasty campaign. The loudest noise will come, of course, from the millions of Kennedy enthusiasts.

But the Kennedy enthusiasts are a special sect, rather like the Goldwater enthusiasts at the opposite end of the spectrum in 1964. Their cheers will chiefly serve to arouse the sect of Kennedy haters, which is also large. Noisy and nasty are mild adjectives, in truth. But it is a campaign that the President reportedly looks forward to.

Included in version carried by SFChronicle 27 Mar 72, filed Nix Ad:
* Senator Kennedy also keeps telling all and sundry that he can support either Ed or Hubert." But suppose Muskie drops by the wayside, leaving only Humphrey. Suppose the California delegation, already entered for Muskie, then declares itself a Kennedy delegation at heart. [McGovern?]