

KENNEDY MOVING TO BACK M'GOVERN

Neutral in Public, He Seems
to Prefer Dakotan, as Do
His Family and Friends

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WASHINGTON, April 28—In the wake of Senator Edmund S. Muskie's withdrawal from the Democratic Presidential primary campaign, Senator Edward M. Kennedy is moving, so far only in private, toward endorsing Senator George McGovern.

In public, the Massachusetts Democrat continues to maintain strict neutrality. A spokesman reaffirmed it today, saying: "He's said all along he did not expect to make any endorsement before the convention and that has not changed."

But there have now been a series of indications that Mr. Kennedy, his family and friends favor Mr. McGovern over Senator Hubert H. Humphrey for the Presidential nomination.

Among these indications are the following:

¶ Mr. Kennedy has expressed his preference for Mr. McGovern in private conversation since Mr. Muskie's poor showing in Tuesday's Pennsylvania primary.

¶ Today, Senator Abraham A. Ribicoff, Democrat of Connecticut, long close to the Kennedy family, announced his

Continued on Page 12, Column 4

Continued From Page 1, Col. 2

support of Senator McGovern. He said he no longer thought Mr. Kennedy would be likely to become a compromise candidate at a deadlocked Democratic convention. Senator Ribicoff told reporters that he had informed Mr. Kennedy, who replied, "That's fine." Mr. Ribicoff added his hope that Senator Kennedy would also endorse Mr. McGovern.

¶ Last week, two of the late Robert F. Kennedy's children lent their support to Mr. McGovern. When asked whether he was supporting the South Dakota Senator, 19-year-old Joseph P. Kennedy 3d responded, "Of course, isn't everybody?" His sister Kathleen campaigned for Mr. McGovern in Pennsylvania.

¶ Last month, Mrs. Robert F. Kennedy went out of her way to give Mr. McGovern a warm airport greeting when he arrived in Palm Beach for a Florida campaign trip. Kennedy associates said she was prepared to say she would vote for him.

For Mr. Kennedy to endorse Senator McGovern over Senator Humphrey would not be surprising. Mr. McGovern served as an official in President Kennedy's Administration, was a strong supporter of Robert Kennedy's 1968 campaign, and continued that campaign after the New York Senator was assassinated.

Timing Is a Problem

But Democratic party professionals regard the timing of such an endorsement as a dilemma for Mr. Kennedy.

In one official's view, the longer Senator Kennedy waits, the more doubt is cast on the credibility of his repeated insistence that he is not a candidate himself by suggesting his receptivity to being drafted by the convention.

On the other hand, if he were to give an early McGovern endorsement, he might risk offending both Humphrey and McGovern Democrats.

Senator Kennedy's support for Mr. McGovern could hurt Mr. Humphrey's efforts substantially. For example, he might help Senator McGovern cut into the black vote, which has, so far, gone heavily to the former Vice President.

The New York Times/Daniel Yankelovich, Inc., survey of Pennsylvania Democratic voters showed that Mr. Humphrey won three of every four black votes. At the same time, it showed that Mr. Kennedy was so popular among blacks that virtually all would have switched to him had he been a candidate.

Fear Unfriendly Reaction

Friends of Senator Kennedy also see possible dangers of an early endorsement among McGovern supporters, many of whom have worked for him from a time when his candidacy was ridiculed.

Now that he is universally considered a serious contender, it is feared they would take offense were the widely known Mr. Kennedy now to move, even as a supporter, into the painfully won McGovern limelight.

This fear coincides with renewed political bubblings that Senator Kennedy would allow himself to be drafted following a McGovern-Humphrey deadlock at the convention. For instance, when Mayor Richard J. Daley of Chicago was asked whether he saw sentiment for

a Kennedy draft, he replied, "Don't you?"

Senator John V. Tunney, California Democrat and longtime friend of Mr. Kennedy, sought to throw cold water on such talk today.

In a statement, Mr. Tunney said he had urged Mr. Kennedy to reject any draft effort. He

acknowledged that Mr. Kennedy might conceivably be "swayed by passion." But otherwise, he said, "I'm absolutely convinced Ted Kennedy does not want to be a candidate this year."

Senator Ribicoff sounded a similar theme in his McGovern endorsement statement. If Mr. Kennedy were to get the nomination after a draft and without having gone through the Democratic primaries, the nomination "wouldn't be worth a plug nickel," he said.