

Kennedy and the Vice-Presidency

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WASHINGTON, June 15—About 10:30 yesterday morning, Senator Edward M. Kennedy's face turned, as one bystander described it, "as red as a man's face can get."

The cause was not the Senate Hunger Committee hearing the Senator was holding. It was an article in The Boston Globe reporting that he would not exclude the possibility of becoming Senator George McGovern's running mate on the Democratic ticket.

Throwing down the paper, Senator Kennedy marched out the hall to a waiting cluster of reporters. Then, in two almost consecutive, apparently contradictory sentences, he brewed up a fascinating set of tea leaves for the oracles of Washington to read.

In the first sentence, the Massachusetts Democrat appeared to bolt a door he has repeatedly closed whenever speculation has arisen about his presence on the ticket:

"I am not a candidate for President nor would I accept a draft nor am I a candidate for Vice President nor would I accept a draft."

But then he went on, seemingly, to unbolt the door—and perhaps even open it a crack. What he said he had told Martin Nolan, The Globe reporter, was that if his presence on the ticket were critical to victory in November, then "of course" he would consider the Vice-Presidential slot. "But," he added, "I think that's a far reach from saying I'd accept the nomination."

Three Interpretations

Considering Senator Kennedy's wide potential support, notably among blacks and Roman Catholics, some—including both Kennedy and McGovern advisers—think that it is not a very far reach at all. And thus the problem for the oracles was how to reconcile the two statements. There were three principal interpretations.

In the absence of further explanation from the two principals, no one could say that any—or all three together—were right. But at a minimum, the possibility of a Kennedy Vice-Presidential candidacy has

3 Views Offered on His Remarks About Place on Ticket

now come to the surface and been taken seriously at least by Republican campaign leaders.

The Republicans have expressed increasing concern about a McGovern candidacy that, according to an Associated Press report today, would be made "more frightful" with Senator Kennedy as the running mate.

The simplest of the three interpretations was that Senator Kennedy's aim, in his interview with Mr. Nolan, was merely to give the McGovern candidacy another subtle boost. The Senator has insisted that he would make no formal endorsement until the convention, but he has taken pains to express private support for Mr. McGovern.

The problem, in this view, is that Mr. Nolan's story came out sounding too affirmative about the number two spot. The explanation for the seeming contradiction, thus, is that Mr. Kennedy was only trying to close the door again—but without either rebuking Mr. Nolan, a respected reporter, or appearing to diminish his tacit McGovern support.

Given Washington's usual easy virtue in matters of semantics, this interpretation alone might suffice. But there are others, including members of both the McGovern and Kennedy camps, who favor a second explanation: Disclaimers notwithstanding, Senator Kennedy is interested in the number two spot after all.

These observers ask not to be identified, for reasons characterized by a ranking aide to one of the Senators: "It's a little spooky—it's like talking about a no-hitter in the eighth inning." But once they are guaranteed anonymity, their reasoning spills out.

The first interpretation "just won't wash" in the opinion of one Kennedy partisan. "Teddy's too aware of what newspaper stories look like the next morning and Marty Nolan's too good a reporter. I think Teddy was opening the door."

The rationale offered is that should a McGovern-Kennedy ticket win, Mr. Kennedy would win substantial credit, expunge some of the taint of his 1968 accident at Chappaquidick, and further his long-term chances to become number one.

Should the ticket lose, Mr. Kennedy would be in a good position for the 1976 campaign, having won high marks for being a "good party soldier" and having maintained a link with the vast corps of youth supporting Mr. McGovern.

Blame for Loss Seen

Some Kennedy aides contest this reasoning. They regard a Kennedy Vice-Presidential candidacy as a highly remote possibility. "I just don't believe he wants it," one said. "Why should he freeze himself into that job when he has full freedom to speak out from the Senate?" Another argues that should a McGovern-Kennedy ticket lose, the Massachusetts senator would risk being blamed.

The McGovern camp also appears to be of two minds. One partisan believes Mr. Kennedy's inclusion on the ticket is far from settled. It would be an undoubted asset, he said, and "it could go either way. Right now, I'd say the odds are maybe 3-to-2 against it."

Other McGovern supporters—long hostile to any overshadowing intrusion from the Massachusetts Senator—insist that a McGovern-Kennedy ticket is highly unlikely. "Why, if Teddy is a real possibility for number two, then he's a real possibility for number one," said one person.

He meant that as evidence that Mr. Kennedy wants neither job. But one prominent Congressional ally of Mr. Kennedy takes the reverse view, offering the third interpretation of the Senator's position. "I think he wants the Presidency," he said. I don't mean he wants to block McGovern. But if McGovern falters, then there's only one man the party can turn to."

Would Mr. Kennedy accept the Vice Presidency? The Congressman responds quickly, in the same terms offered by another Kennedy supporter. No one, he says, at least not since Henry Clay in 1840, has ever turned it down.