

# The Moon and Politics

## Kennedy Accident Distracts the Capital From Thoughts of Triumph in Space

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WASHINGTON, July 20 — Though it excited much of mankind by landing men on the moon, Washington could not altogether keep its mind off the earth today. More particularly, it could not fully keep its mind off politics—the politics of calculated drama, like the moon voyage, by which John F. Kennedy chose to advertise the nation's prowess; and the politics of fateful mishaps, like the one on Martha's Vineyard that suddenly clouded the future of the late President's last surviving brother, Senator Edward M. Kennedy of Massachusetts.

The exotic adventure of the moon and the tragic accident on the Vineyard became all confused in the conversation of this capital this weekend.

Thoughts ran back to the Kennedy who vowed to put the nation on the moon ahead of the Russians in the dark days of 1961 and who two years later was shot down in the first of a series of convulsions that have shattered the country's confidence in itself.

Thoughts also ran ahead to the Kennedy who had seemed inevitably bound to make his own bid for the White House only to be dogged by his family's harsh luck.

### Support from Mansfield

"After all, even a politician is human," said Senator Mike Mansfield, the majority leader, when questions about Senator Kennedy were thrown at him after White House religious services to mark this epic day. "He has my full confidence. I feel sorry for the family. It's a tragedy all the way around."

Tragedy. Confidence. Priority. These were some of the words that dominated the talk here. President Nixon, though criticized in some quarters on grounds he had injected himself too much into the moon landing proceedings, was plainly trying to use his office to promote President Kennedy's original purpose: to dramatize the nation's technical, scientific and military strength, to drown out riot at home and war abroad and recapture prestige in the world and his self-confidence of Americans.

The President will set out Tuesday to watch the mid-Pacific splashdown of the astronauts and will then circle the earth to share the glory.

But members of his Administration were sitting at dinners this weekend still wondering whether he could end the war in Vietnam soon enough and speculating about whether even the moon landing could revive the nation's sense of purpose.

For weeks now, speakers in Congress, including Senator Kennedy and many other Government officials, have emphasized their desire to shift priorities now from the exploration of space to the development of the earth, notably of the United States itself.

But they have found it difficult, as President Kennedy did eight years ago, to think of other projects that could be so simply stated, vividly portrayed and so easily made the focus of enormous governmental effort and public support.

They have talked of drawing the salt from the earth's waters, of dramatically curbing population growth, of rebuilding American cities or delivering medical care or superior education to every citizen.

But as one sub-Cabinet offi-

cial remarked last evening, most of man's earthbound needs require much more than even fantastic engineering feats. "They cut across politics," he said, and are not going to be subject to moon programs."

The sense of paradox, about success in other worlds and awesome problems in this one, was recognized everywhere. At the moment of the moon landing, there were 203,377,182 Americans, according to the census clock here. That was 24,060,182 persons more than lived in the United States when the space program went into high gear in 1960.

That figure of increment, in turn, is almost exactly the number of persons estimated to be living today in what the Government defines as poverty.

The cost of the space program over the last 10 fiscal years totals \$24,997,800,000, which is about the amount that Americans spend on food, drink and tobacco in one year and half of one year's corporate profits after taxes.

It is twice the amount that individuals donate to philanthropic causes each year and three times the amount spent annually for welfare and other forms of public assistance. The space program to date has cost half of one year's expenditure on American public education.

### New Priorities Sought

The challenge implied by these figures is felt throughout the capital. That is why the Congress and the White House are separately searching for ways to reshape the country's priorities of objective and expenditure.

Yet politics remains the highest priority of this political city. Senator Kennedy's accident competed for attention wherever political figures gathered here a even President Nixon was asked about it on this dramatic day. He knew nothing about it, he said.

The rest of Washington did not know much about it either but quick conclusions were already being drawn about how badly the Senator's political career had been hurt in the fatal car accident.

Thus as in other moments of triumph here, the talk of who is up was offset immediately by speculation about who was down. It was not the most edifying posture for the capital that launched the great rocket to another world, but it was, as Senator Mansfield suggested, human.

Shortly after Eagle landed on the moon this afternoon, the skies here grew dark and angry and within an hour they poured rain, lightning and thunder over the most powerful men on earth.