

Ted's Absence Perils Senate Fight on ABM

By William McGaffin

WASHINGTON — (CDN)

Sen. Edward Kennedy's tragic accident may have wide-ranging implications affecting everyone in America on a controversial matter of vital national policy.

One result is that the battle to defeat the anti-ballistic

missile system sought by the Nixon Administration may be lost.

Image Blurred

If this happens, the personal tragedy suffered by the Massachusetts Democrat will become, in turn, an event of portentous significance for those Americans opposed to the Safeguard ABM system.

While the ABM opponents will not admit this publicly, it is feared Kennedy's influence with the public may have been shaken at least temporarily by some of the unexplained facts about the accident.

If this is the case, it would weaken him as a popular symbol and rallying point for public pressure against Senate approval of the ABM.

The senator had continued to be a symbol of opposition to the ABM even though he had in recent weeks "gone underground."

He had deliberately dropped out of public opposition to the ABM because the White House had begun to use his opposition as a pretext to try to change the views of Republican senators opposed to the ABM.

Party Loyalty

The White House had made the ABM issue a matter of party loyalty and told the dissident Republicans they were building up Kennedy as a 1972 opponent of President Nixon by their opposition to the ABM.

Aside from the psychological damage suffered because Kennedy's image has been tarnished, at least temporarily, there is also the worrisome factor for the ABM opponents that the accident removed Kennedy from the Senate at a crucial point in the ABM debate.

This was the week that the opposition opened its floor fight to block deployment of the ABM system. Had the accident not happened, Kennedy would have been here, contributing his expertise and influence as the Senate majority whip in the strategy sessions being held behind the scenes by the ABM opponents.

In Seclusion

Instead, he remains secluded in Hyannis Port, Mass.

Instead of concentrating his energies on ways to beat the ABM, he and his advisers are trying to determine how he can prevent the accident from becoming a permanent roadblock to his presidential candidacy.