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Kennedy and ABM Fight

WASHINGTON — In view of Senator Ted Kennedy's own statement about his troubles, nobody should indulge in personal comments on what befell the luckless Democratic Senate majority whip on lonely Chappaquiddick Island.

But the quirks of personal fate often work in a quite callous way to shift the course of history. This, despite one's first impulse to say nothing of any sort about the Kennedy involvement in tragedy, demands comment.

IT SO HAPPENED that the accident in Massachusetts effectively removed the captain of the anti-ABM forces in the Senate at a most critical moment. True enough. Ted Kennedy had not taken a front-stage position in the battle.

Even so, the anti-ABM crusade was bound up from its inception with Ted Kennedy's felt need to oppose President Nixon's first important military policy decision. Kennedy had sponsored the Dr. Jerome Wiesner-Professor Abram Chayes anti-ABM book which had kicked off the whole rumpus. Kennedy men toured the country to present the Wiesner-Chayes arguments; they turned up on campuses and at forums with well-oiled regularity.

Anti-ABM letters poured in on Congress, many of them suspiciously uniform in both arguments and phraseology. It was all a "snow job," quite in keeping with Kennedy-organized crusades in the past. And Ted Kennedy, as whip, stood ready to marshal the Democratic votes at the close.

The Nixon forces moved into action somewhat belatedly. Their literature — a sharp study by Herman Kahn of the Hud-

son Institute, presenting the case for a "thin" ABM deployment, and a well-reasoned document called "The ABM and the Changed Strategic Military Balance: U.S.A. vs. U.S.S.R.," put out by the American Security Council — has only recently begun to move through the mails.

Weeks after the spate of letter-writing provoked by the Wiesner-Chayes crusade had started to dribble off, a flood of pro-ABM letters descended on Congress.

The day of decision on the ABM was fast approaching amid frenzied counting and counter-counting in the Senate anterooms. And Vice President Agnew was girding to break a possible 50-50 tie when Ted Kennedy, the quiet leader of the opposition, met disaster on a Massachusetts weekend.

The comment of an administrative assistant to a hitherto uncommitted Democratic Senator who had just decided for the ABM seems pertinent. "With Ted Kennedy out of the fight," he said, "the anti-ABM team is without a head. Dick Goodwin and Jerome Wiesner can't very well carry the ball without their leader."

STICKING my neck out. I would say that the ABM should carry by a 55-45 vote. It should go that way partly because Ted Kennedy was out of the fight and partly because of the successful return to earth of our moon conquerors, who proved that with rockets, computers and electronics you can "home" on the most unimaginable targets, even, possibly, on an incoming Soviet missile.

Mr. Nixon, once considered a born loser, has turned into a most dramatic sort of winner. Who would have guessed it in 1960 or 1962?