

Mr. Kennedy's Response

The response of many thousands of citizens of Massachusetts to Senator Edward M. Kennedy's appeal was predictable. And so was his announcement yesterday that he would indeed remain as Senator from Massachusetts and seek re-election next year. Both the appeal and his speedy "response" suggest a carefully worked-out plan to re-establish his political position in the eyes of the voters of his state. His position as a candidate for the Presidency is quite another matter, consideration of which he has now wisely deferred until 1976 by his promise to serve the full Senatorial term if he is re-elected.

When he ostensibly asked the electorate for "advice," Senator Kennedy was really asking for an outpouring of support on the basis of a partially irrelevant and totally unsatisfactory *ex parte* account of the tragic events of the night and early morning of July 18-19. We make this observation only with the greatest regret and reluctance. We have deepest sympathy for the victims and, quite apart from the personal and human considerations, we have nothing but admiration for the political position taken by this rising young leader of the liberal forces of the United States Senate.

But it is just because Senator Kennedy is essentially a public rather than a private person, a man who is not only Senator of the United States but widely considered to be a potential—even probable—candidate for the Presidency of the United States, that it is necessary carefully and objectively to examine his conduct in times of extreme stress.

Senator Kennedy himself said that his failure to report the accident immediately was "indefensible." But that was not the only thing that appeared indefensible. It was indefensible—or so it seems in the

present state of our knowledge—for the Senator to fail to seek immediate help from occupants of a nearby house, to walk more than a mile past other houses to confer with friends, to bring them back to the scene of the accident still without notifying anyone else and to delay informing the police for many hours, until the next morning. If the Senator was in shock, he could hardly have done some of these things; if he was not, he could hardly be excused for doing them.

The picture of the Senator locking himself up in his Hyannis Port compound for a solid week while conferring with the most highpowered advisers available is not a pretty one. It reinforces the suspicion, already aroused by his failure to report the accident until after he had conferred or tried to confer with a battery of lawyers, that his priority interest from the moment of the accident was to avoid assumption of responsibility for this tragic situation. So does the subsequent procedure in Edgartown, where a plea of guilty to leaving the scene of an accident forestalled any further questioning in court—and, presumably, by any officials of the State of Massachusetts, not that they had shown much interest in asking questions in the first place.

Senator Kennedy may well have told nothing but the truth in this matter, and for his sake and that of the American people we hope he has done so. But there are so many gaping holes in the story which he has so assiduously avoided filling, there is such an unmistakable atmosphere of calculated evaluation for maximum—or, as the case may be, minimum—public effect, that we cannot consider the matter to have been satisfactorily resolved in any sense, and certainly not by his statement of yesterday.

Senator's Enemies

To the Editor:

The youth of this country know that there are powerful forces seeking to destroy Senator Edward Kennedy. Any incident, however tragic, serves their purpose. These forces will receive the proper rebuff at the opportune time.

PETER STUART
New York, July 27, 1969