## EVANS AND NOVAK

Ted Leaves Political Trap



of July 25 all but assures the continuation of rancid speculation and criticism likely to erode further his national political potential. The erosion is deep enough today. There is an increased tendency by political friends as well as foes to write him off as presidential nominee for 1972 and possibly the possible. for 1972 and possibly thereafter.

Pro-Kennedy Democrats who had optimistically suspended judgment before Kennedy's Friday night television appearance are now deeply saddened and deeply critical, sensing that he has said his last word.

One liberal congressman, for example, told us bluntly that his doubts about Kennedy's fitness for the presidency stem from the senator's "refusal to accept responsibility." The fact that Kennedy himself called his conduct "indefensible" was not compelling to this congressman.

Instead of a more complete explanation that might wipe away those doubts, Kennedy has chosen silence—amid hope by some of his supporters that time will erase memories of the tragedy. Therein lies Kennedy's political trap. His refusal to talk will receive nationwide exposure at the inevitable first confronta-tion between Kennedy and the press. That can only multiply suspicions that there was something to hide on Martha's Vine-

Similar suspicions about unanswered questions have been aroused in Democratic politicians who long have backed the Kennedys but who were neither advised nor consulted in the present crisis. To some of them, all the events that followed the

accident on Cape Cod suggest i pointment. some unexplained need for secrecy.

Actually, early polling results and trips home last weekend by congressmen point to considerably wider acceptance of Kennedy's presentation than is the case with either politicians or the press.

Moreover, some politicians both parties described the Friday night speech as an adept exercise in public relations, making the best of an intolerable situation.

Fully six hours before the speech, a leading Republican publicist forecast its outlines in uncanny detail—the eulogy of Miss Kopechne, the blanket admission of guilt, the fuzzing of details, the culminating appeal for public support, in the fashion of Richard Nixon's famed Checkers speech of 1952.

But apart from public relations technicians, the political community has tended to react unfavorably toward the speech. One veteran political operative close to the Kennedys believes he would have done better to speak earlier and more candid-ly, perhaps extemporaneously or even in press conference format.

"From a standpoint of the puritan ethic, Ted could have shown a greater spirit of self-abnegation," one Kennedy insider told us. Another political opder told us. Another political op-erative, fully committed to Ken-nedy in 1972 less than two weeks ago, said the speech "contained too much self-pity and not enough forthrightness." Still another pro-Kennedy con-gressman deplored self-deprecatory adjectives, designed to show his inner tension, that may haunt the senator in future campaigns.

For those who had been literally praying for some explanation from Hyannis Port tying up all loose ends, the Friday night statement was a disap-

A Democratic organization lieutenant from Chicago who be-fore Friday night had been urging friends to suspend judgment is now writing Kennedy off as finished.

In sum, there is a growing tendency, absent a week earlier, to make frail and obviously immature judgments about Kennedy's future. One labor leader who had been eager to see Kennedy in the White House now tells associates that the sena-tor's future is now wholly as a Senate leader. While Kennedy's abilities are unimpaired, this union chief feels, his record now can never be placed before the national electorate.

Such opinions are voiced more widely by politicians than by voters, more preponderantly in Washington than in state capitals, and more loudly in the House than in the Senate (where Kennedy's colleagues have shown a club-like refusal to gossip in the cloakrooms). But relayed by the press, this critical undercurrent among the professionals could eat into his

wide popular base.

But with all this, there are valid reasons for not definitively writing off Kennedy nationally, even for 1972. There remains a hard and intensely loyal national cadre of Kennedyites, some of whom have political futures of their own inseparably tied to his future.

As one Kennedy backer told us, "Charisma is in very short supply." Democratic fundacia supply." Democratic fundraisers advise that Kennedy is still their first choice to fill the hall.

Accordingly, the 1972 vacu-um left by Kennedy will not be filled rapidly. Although Hubert H. Humphrey's Washington of-fice jumped into quick action on the telephone in the past 10 days, old Humphreyites contacted by us are less than ecstatic about a last hurrah by their champion and seemed to prefer Sen. Edmund Muskie of Maine. Muskie enthusiasm, however, is also subdued.

This suggests that Kennedy's rehabilitation is at least conceivable if he now resumes his outstanding Senate performance and if the undercurrent of speculation about the auto accident subsides. But that is Ted Kennedy's dilemma.

His present decision to leave so many questions unan-swered suggests that the fateful auto accident will indefinitely burden his political future.

## Letters to the Editor

## Faults Kennedy

Editor, States-Item:

I am not jumping for joy at the latest Kennedy tragedy, but I do, nevertheless, feel a little malicious. I feel Mr. Kennedy has handled himself badly and in poor faith, if not actually insultingly to the American level of intelligence.

I am a career woman and at one time worked for a criminal attorney. These two instances provide for me two different points of view. First, that "there but for the Grace of God . . ." as a secretary; and sec-. ." as a secretary; and second, recognition that Mr. Kennedy has literally thrown himself "on the mercy of the court," which to any experienced legal mind means "I'm guilty as hell."

His play for sympathy was well delivered and as I watched

and listened to him, I felt emotions of compassion, but the cold light of dawn brought reason and reality back home. The girl is dead. Death is forever. I feel his behavior was cowardly and unmanly. Someone else has already come forward with the biggest question, i.e., what would happen if he were at a cocktail party and the Red

Chinese attacked. Would he have the presence of mind to advise the Pentagon?

A firm and ever-constant control on one's presence of mind is mandatory at any level of life, and to me, Mr. Kennedy has decidedly displayed a loss of presence. I do not want him for my president. There are too many unanswered and obvious questions.

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