

The World Scene

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Where Does the Senator Go From Here



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THE legal case of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts vs. Edward Kennedy is, from all indications, closed. The political case is still open despite the Senator's announcement yesterday that he would not seek the Presidency in 1972.

Two weeks ago, it is fair to say, he was a half-content man. He liked being the Senator from Massachusetts and the assistant leader of the Senate majority. He seemed also to enjoy the process he was going through to educate himself, to acquire, bit by bit, a political philosophy of his own which involved coming to grips on his own terms with "issues" he had avoided or neglected before.

What he didn't like, according to his friends, his speechwriters and his political gurus, was the feeling, as one of them has put it, that he was an unwilling passenger on an express train that was taking him inexorably into the pressure chamber of presidential politics.

He wanted to make his own decisions, to control his own fate, and that was proving almost impossible. He felt, in short, trapped by circumstances, with no way out.

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THAT is no longer the case as a result of the events of July 18 on Chappaquiddick Island. Kennedy is not now a "leading" or "inevitable" or even plausible candidate for the Presidency in 1972. For him and for the country, that may be just as well.

He got his Senate seat in 1962 at the age of 30, not on merit, not on personal achievement, but as a gift from a constituency that would deny the Kennedys nothing in a political sense. He had no coherent political philosophy at that time, no sense of political direction, no game plan for his life.

The one thing he knew was his place;

Arthur Hoppe is on vacation.

he was the junior member of the family political enterprise with no reason to assume he would ever be anything else.

Two assassinations changed all that and made him, through no choice of his own, a presidential candidate. The reason was simply that he was a Kennedy. The question of his readiness for the White House was rarely if ever raised by the people promoting his candidacy. To them he seemed electable and that was all that mattered.

In retrospect, it makes little sense, for he is one of the least known of all the prominent men in American public life.

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HIS circle of close friends — people in whom he confides and who can claim legitimately to know what is in his mind — is limited to three or four people, none of whom is a member of Senate.

He is not chummy with reporters. His remoteness from the press is best indicated by the fact that, excepting the weekly news magazines, there have not been a dozen serious articles about him in national periodicals in the past two years.

Thus, neither the country nor the political community could claim to know very much about the youngest Kennedy brother other than the fact that he was indeed a Kennedy.

What happened on Chappaquiddick Island was a personal tragedy for everyone involved. Whether it was a political tragedy for Kennedy or for the country, however, is an entirely different question. An electorate needs to know its potential leaders and it is no less important that they should know themselves. Ultimately, that may be the constructive outcome of this affair.

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