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Weeping-Weary Demos Toss About for Leader

WASHINGTON — The Democrats thought 1968 was their year of tears. But 1969 is beginning to be just as damp. Last week was one of their worst "in creation," to borrow a phrase from one of President Nixon's lunar raptures. After all that has happened, some Democrats feel they should disband and regroup in a while under a different name. Or at least they should start looking for leaders who don't make them cry.

Republicans, at least in this situation, have managed to conduct their party affairs without reaching for their handkerchiefs. They go dry-eyed for decades. The Democrats have been weeping almost continuously since November, 1963, and last Friday, watching the last of the Kennedy brothers telling a sorry story of panic and confusion in a moment of crisis, has started them up all over again.

Whatever their troubles before the Teddy tragedy, the Democrats at least had a candidate for 1972. They had anticipated a comparatively calm period with the young senator from Massachusetts inexorably advancing on the legend and the issue to a challenge of Nixon.

Now, racked and drained anew, they contemplate the future numbly. His television appearance elicited a great first wave of sympathy, but pity has given way to skepticism, and the predictable response from Massachusetts voters is

being received with weary cynicism.

The only happy Democrat in sight was the titular leader of the party, Hubert Humphrey, who bobbed up in the capital looking tanned, cheerful and vibrant, signing autographs from well-wishers who told him to try again for the great prize.

The prospect leaves the majority of Democrats glum. They are not ready, as one of them said, "to go through 1968 again."

Humphrey's erstwhile running-mate, Sen. Edmund S. Muskie of Maine, who a month ago resigned himself to the "inevitability" of Teddy, is now reassessing his position and might be prepared to challenge Humphrey in primaries.

Sen. George S. McGovern of South Dakota apparently thinks he may have a chance in the new situation. He is the most liberal of the contenders, but has failed to stir any emotion, which might turn out to be a plus. The Democrats haven't many tears left.