

# Kennedy Is Saying Privately He Won't Run

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 15 — Senator Edward M. Kennedy is saying privately, to his closest political associates, that it is extremely unlikely that he will run for President in 1976.

Mr. Kennedy has said repeatedly over the last six months that he felt reluctant to make the race. But now, with the pressures mounting upon him to run, he is expressing his views in stronger terms.

Nevertheless, some visitors to his capitol Hill office are going away with the impression that he is already in the race. According to Kennedy staff members, they come to see the Senator because they desperately want him to run and, when he says only that he intends to keep his options open until late 1975, they convince themselves that he is encouraging them.

Thus, after a two-hour luncheon here last Thursday, Harold Willens, who raised money in 1968 for former Senator Eugene R. McCarthy and in 1972 for Senator George McGovern. Mr. Kennedy is said to have felt that he had been even-handed with a man whom he did not know well.

## Astonished and Irritated

But Mr. Willens returned to California and told his fundraising colleagues that he hoped and believed that Mr. Kennedy was already in the race. The Senator and his staff were astonished and somewhat irritated by that interpretation.

Mr. Kennedy has said within the last week that the illness of his 12-year-old son, Teddy, who has had a leg amputated because of cancer, is the strongest factor militating against any candidacy.

But his associates suggest that that is only the most recent explanation that Mr. Kennedy has supplied to buttress his reluctance to seek the

Presidency. Among the others they cite are a fear of assassination, his family's opposition to a Presidential race and the possible adverse political consequences of Mr. Kennedy's accident on Chappaquiddick Island in 1969.

To those of his intimates who have asked, Mr. Kennedy has said that his present disposition, strongly held, is not to run. It would not matter to him, he has said, whether Senator Henry M. Jackson of Washington appeared the likely Democratic nominee; nor would it matter what his own chances seemed to be.

"You don't run only when the golden moment appears," he has been quoted as saying. The Massachusetts Democrat, who is 42 years old, has made it clear to his close associates that only some dramatic change in the condition of his son would persuade him to change his mind.

## Late 1975

But in his conversations with other politicians he has been less candid. He has told them only that he would make no decision until late 1975, and he has listened sympathetically but noncommittally to their pleas that he challenge Senator Jackson.

"Willens came in here thinking that he and the other anti-war people had no place to go if Teddy didn't run," said one Kennedy staff member. "The wish was father to the conclusion. Teddy was nice to him, so he concluded that the Senator was already in the campaign."

"The same thing happened all the time in 1972" he said. What you had to remember then, what you have to remember now, is that Ted is not about to pass the word through somebody like Harold Willens when he knows so many other pols so much better."

Mr. Willens said this evening in California that his im-

pressions of his conversation with the Senator had been overdrawn. He said that he continued to hope that Mr. Kennedy would run but that he had received no assurances.

"Basically," he said, "what Ted and I spoke about was the state of the country and the party and the work some of my friends and I are doing on issues that matter to us. At no time did I try to extort any promises from him for 1976."

According to Mr. Kennedy's staff, there was been a widespread tendency among former workers for John and Robert Kennedy who have not been

particularly close to the youngest brother to go well beyond the Senator's wishes.

One such old Kennedy hand, for example, telephone a Washington correspondent for a major newspaper recently to ask whether he would be willing to write a book on Chappaquiddick — the incident in which Mary Jo Kopechne, a young secretary was drowned when the Senator's car plunged off a bridge on that island off Cape Cod.

The implication was that the Senator would cooperate in the writing of such a book, but in fact he had not been consulted.