

Ted Kennedy's at sea between



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Reporters travelling with Sen. Ted Kennedy on a recent political swing noticed two things that were new:

First, Kennedy suddenly said he soon will indicate whether he expects to run for president in 1976 — moving up his announced timetable by nearly a year.

But even as the Massachusetts senator accelerated his '76 scenario, he seemed to find the hurly-burly of campaigning far less enjoyable than he usually does.

Some qualified observers are puzzled by Kennedy at the moment. They see evidence he is a man at sea within himself.

If Kennedy has really become such a bundle of contradictions, there may be a single logical explanation: Gnawing personal concern for the closest members of his family.

His wife, Joan, who is emotionally frail, has required periodic treatment this year in private mental institutions.

Even more worrisome is the condition of the senator's 12-year-old son, Teddy. He continues to undergo traumatic drug treatments for the bone cancer which cost him a leg late last year.

These conditions have given fresh and poignant meaning to Kennedy's oft-repeated statement that personal factors and "concern for my family" would weigh most heavily in his decision about running for president.

politics and his family

If that statement is taken at face value, one would assume that now, more than ever, Kennedy has to be leaning away from bringing the immense pressures of a presidential race into his complicated personal life.

But some who have kept a close eye on the senator feel that the more his personal and family worries have increased this year, the more he has begun to talk and behave as if he definitely plans to run.

"It is almost as if he is turning to presidential politics as a release — something to get him out of the house," says one observer.

Whatever the reason, the recent developments in Kennedy's conduct are having considerable impact.

Only 10 days ago, ^{12 SEP}during a trip to address a friendly labor audience in Lansing, Mich., Kennedy gave no hint of such changes.

His partisan speech was full of fire and feeling, the sort of sharp performance he can deliver almost effortlessly.

When Lansing newsmen asked whether he would run in 1976, he repeated the answer he has clung to for almost two years: He won't decide until late in 1975.

But one week later, ^{19 SEP}during a three-day swing that began in Cincinnati and ended in California, the senator suddenly abandoned that stock answer.

In Los Angeles, he said he expects to indicate his intentions late this year or early in 1975.

Thinking back, newsmen noted that two events had occurred in the Kennedy family in the week between his Lansing speech and his California announcement:

- The senator's son had entered a hospital for another in the difficult courses of drug therapy seeking to curb his cancer.

- Mrs. Joan Kennedy had been admitted to a private clinic somewhere in California for a "rest" (although she left the hospital to hear her husband speak to a luncheon crowd of 1,700 in Los Angeles).

Perhaps these matters had no relation to the shift in the senator's political plans, for in several subsequent interviews Kennedy showed that he has been giving long-term thought to the next presidential race.

For openers Kennedy estimated that a strong Republican candidate (whether Ford or someone else) could begin the campaign with the support of about 42 per cent of the voters and that he himself could muster similar strength. The outcome would hinge on who could bite deepest into the remaining 16 per cent during the campaign.

"I think that I would have a good chance to win the (Democratic) nomination and a reasonable chance to win the election, and I think that's the most anyone could hope to have going for him when he starts out on something like that," Kennedy said as his small chartered plane circled over San Francisco Bay on the final leg of his tour.