

# Kennedy Says No For 1976

Boston

Senator Edward M. Kennedy, heir to one of the great family traditions in American politics, removed himself all but irrevocably yesterday from the 1976 presidential contest.

At a tumultuous news conference in the Parker House hotel, just below Beacon Hill, Kennedy said he was forswearing a campaign for national office because "I simply cannot do that to my wife and children and the other members of my family."

Until the moment he spoke, the 42-year-old Massachusetts Democrat had been considered by the leaders of his party the favorite for its presidential nomination two years from now, despite growing misgivings about his chances of defeating President Ford in the general election.

Kennedy's eyes were bloodshot but he appeared calm and resolute as he outlined his attitude. His language left little room for doubt that his decision was definitive.

"This decision," he said, "is firm, final and unconditional. There is absolutely no circumstance or event that will alter the decision. I will not accept a nomination. I will not accept a draft. I will oppose any effort to place my name in nomination in any state or at the national convention.

"And I will oppose any effort to promote my candidacy in any other way."

The decision of Kennedy, brother of an assassinated president and of an assassinated presidential candidate, threw the 1976 Democratic presidential competition into chaos.

Senators Walter F. Mondale of Minnesota, Lloyd M. Bentsen Jr. of Texas and Henry M. Jackson of Washington have already launched their campaigns.

So has Representative Morris K. Udall of Arizona. Gov-

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ernors George C. Wallace of Alabama, John J. Gilligan of Ohio and Reubin Askew of Florida, among others, have been waiting anxiously in the wings.

But none has been able to make much headway so far; it was hard to raise money or line up support while Kennedy's candidacy was still being bruited. His absence from the field, together with the prospect of at least 25 primary elections, now points toward an open nominating convention.

Kennedy explained his decision solely in terms of his family responsibilities. He said he would be "unable to make a full commitment to a campaign for the presidency."

"Therefore, in 1976, I will not be a candidate for President or vice president of the United States," he said. For the third straight time — he had also done so in 1968 and 1972 — Kennedy thus removed himself from consideration for high national office.

Kennedy in fact had made up his mind more than a month ago, according to intimates. He informed his family and his staff about ten days ago.

"I have chosen to announce the decision now," he said, "in order to ease the apprehensions within my family about the possibility of my candidacy, as well as to clarify the situation within my party."

Kennedy did not specify the nature of the personal responsibilities that led to his statement yesterday.

But they are widely known, both to the public and to Democratic insiders. As the last surviving Kennedy brother, he is father to three children and surrogate father to the offspring of his brothers; his wife, with whom his relationship has sometimes been difficult, has been undergoing psychiatric care, and his son, Edward Jr., had a leg amputated last year in the hope of arresting a rare form of

bone cancer.

His wife, Joan, clad in a white dress with red and blue stripes, sat behind him as he made his announcement. She appeared composed but drawn. She has been under treatment in a California hospital and, according to a member of the Kennedy staff, is expected to return there shortly.

Kennedy's son was reported, both by aides and by informed members of the Boston medical community, to be in no imminent danger. However, doctors familiar with the rigorosity of the treatment to which he is subjected every month said it was "punishing" and produced both physical and emotional side-effects difficult for him and his parents to cope with.

Although Kennedy said yesterday that it was not a major factor, his auto accident at Chippaquiddick Island five years ago almost certainly played some part in his decision. At a time when "morality" and "candor" have become watchwords in American politics, the accident itself — in which Mary Jo Kopechne, a passenger, was drowned — and Kennedy's subsequent explanations were counted as liabilities.

"I can live with my testimony," he told the crowded news conference. "It is a deep personal tragedy, and although I regret the incident, I believe that I could have focused the attention of the country on other issues."

He said that he believed that if he had run, he would have been elected.

A longtime associate of Kennedy said the senator was resigned to the probability that some diehards would not accept his statement. But the associate insisted that "there were no loopholes left and none intended."

Sources close to Kennedy, who plans to seek reelection to the Senate in 1976, said they doubted that he would even attend the 1976 national convention, if only because his presence there would inevitably promote rumors.

Asked about subsequent years, Kennedy said he expects the 1976 Democratic nominee to win and then to be re-elected, thus foreclosing his own ambitions at

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least until 1984. Thus, he said, his decision holds "for any foreseeable future."

But by 1984 — presuming that his forecast is accurate — Kennedy will be only 52 years old, reasonably young in terms of the White House. So his chances for the presidency were being written off by few political professionals.

Kennedy said that neither the party leadership nor his potential rivals for the presidential nomination have brought pressure on him to decide early. However, significant elements in the Democratic party have made it clear — indirectly but unmistakably — that they considered a declaration by Kennedy essential to the task of developing a candidate with any reasonable chance of defeating President Ford in 1976.

In the process of selecting that candidate, Kennedy said, he would try to avoid choosing up sides, because "the people tend to resent pronouncements by elected officials."

New York Times





*UPI Telephoto*

SENATOR EDWARD KENNEDY  
**'This decision is firm, final and unconditional'**