

Bombing Dispute

Bobby, LBJ 'Escalating'

WASHINGTON — (AP) — President Johnson's icy repudiation of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy's call for a peace-seeking halt to bombing of North Vietnam emphasizes their escalating differences.

Johnson twice defended the bombing almost as Kennedy spoke yesterday, but the White House said he would not comment directly on the Kennedy proposals.

Within hours, however, Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Gen. William C. Westmoreland, U.S. military commander in Vietnam, rejected the New York Democrat's proposal that the United States stop bombing the Communist North and announce:

"We are ready to negotiate within the week."

INSTANT REPLY

Rusk said the Communists already have spurned such a formula. Westmoreland said in Saigon any pause in bombing "will cost many additional lives and probably prolong the conflict."

Johnson forearmed a Senate ally with a letter calling the air attacks imperative and saying they will persist until the Hanoi government makes a serious move toward peace.

It bore Wednesday's date and provided an instant rebuttal when Kennedy stood in the Senate to deliver his well-advertised speech.

Shortly before, Johnson discussed the bombing at a surprise news conference.

Kennedy sent an advance copy of his proposals to the White House — which said the manuscript had been passed on to the State Department.

Press Secretary George Christian said Johnson did not read the text.

GAP WIDENS

Kennedy began his speech by saying Johnson is "enti-

—Turn to Page 2, Col. 4

In that letter, Johnson said:

"Both the reasons for — and the results of — the bombing of North Vietnam make it imperative that we continue to use this instrument of support for our men and our allies.

"It will end when the other side is willing to take equivalent action as part of a serious effort to end this war and bring peace to the people of Southeast Asia."

Jackson said Johnson wrote the letter in response to his request after a dinner conversation Feb. 18.

2 VERSIONS

There were two versions of the letter's timing. A Jackson aide said copies of the letter were distributed to newsmen minutes after they arrived from the White House.

The White House said the timing of its release was determined by Jackson.

Kennedy said a halt in the bombing would "test the sincerity of the statement by (Soviet Premier Alexei) Kosygin and others asserting that if the bombardment of the North is halted negotiations would begin . . ."

—From Page 1

tled to our hopeful sympathy, our understanding and our support in the search for peace."

The 12 pages that followed were dotted with harsh words about American tactics in the Southeast Asian war, however.

It adds up to a major expansion of the gap between the President and Kennedy, political heir to his brother, the late President.

LBJ ALLY

"... We should reach for the moment of promise which may have come," Kennedy told 24 Senate colleagues and an audience that crowded the galleries.

"... The fact of the matter is that the bombing of the North can be stopped as a step toward peace without effectively weakening our position in the South."

Sen. Henry M. Jackson (D-Wash.) was Johnson's spokesman on the Senate floor. Minutes after the Kennedy speech began, he made public the President's letter praising, defending and standing firm on the air war in North Vietnam.