

What the President Said to Kennedy

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WASHINGTON, April 4— In his meeting with Senator Robert F. Kennedy yesterday President Johnson said he would remain out of the political fight this year because he did not believe it was appropriate for a "lame duck" President to try to pick his successor.

This and other details of the Johnson-Kennedy meeting were learned today from knowledgeable sources.

The meeting, which Senator Kennedy had requested in the interest of "national unity," was described as an extraordinarily friendly one, with both the Senator and the President speaking in a conciliatory manner.

President Johnson was pic-

tured as the "elder statesman" of the party who had decided to remain aloof from this year's scramble for the Presidency in an effort to keep the party as strong as possible and retain his own dignity and effectiveness as President.

At one point, it was reported, the President said he did not want to make a spectacle of himself as a lame duck President attempting to dictate to the party who should be nominated at the national convention.

In this regard, he pointed out that in 1956 former President Harry S. Truman went to the convention in Chicago and tried to win the nomination for W. Averell Harriman, then Governor of

New York, but failed miserably.

Mr. Truman supported Governor Harriman because he thought he would have a better chance of defeating President Eisenhower in the election that year. When Mr. Truman was described at the time by a reporter as the party's "elder statesman," the former President snapped: "A statesman is just a dead politician, and I'm a very lively politician."

Adlai E. Stevenson, the Democratic nominee in 1952, defeated Governor Harriman on the first ballot 905½ to 92½.

Senator Kennedy announced on March 16 that he was a candidate for

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President and in his subsequent campaign speeches was harshly critical of the Johnson Administration's record, in regard both to the war in Vietnam and to domestic policies.

After the President announced on Sunday night that he would not seek re-election and would reduce the American military effort in Vietnam as a step toward a negotiated peace, Senator Kennedy praised his decision to step down and asked for a meeting with Mr. Johnson.

They met yesterday morning

in the White House Cabinet Room, an oblong room near the President's office with a long conference table and leather upholstered chairs. Later, the President met privately in the same room with Vice President Humphrey and still later with members of his Cabinet.

Senator Kennedy was accompanied by Theodore C. Sorensen, one of his political advisers and a former assistant to Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. President Johnson was accompanied by Walt W. Rostow, special assistant for national security affairs, and Charles Murphy, a consultant to the President.

The White House announced yesterday that the meeting had lasted about an hour, but Kennedy sources said today it was closer to one hour and 40 minutes.

It began with both participants polite. According to Kennedy sources they became increasingly cordial, with both men expressing regret over the reports of animosity between them. Senator Kennedy, it was reported, said he shared some

sort of the blame, but it was agreed that their differences had been magnified by their staff members and the press.

Much of the meeting was devoted to a discussion of the war and national security affairs, but the two men also talked at length about the political situation.

The President was reported to have told the Senator he would not attempt to bind his Cabinet members to any candidate. Administration sources said the President had told the Cabinet members they were free to leave for political interests if their careers demanded it. At the same meeting with his Cabinet, the President praised Vice President Humphrey's record.

As a result of the meeting between Senator Kennedy and the President and the possibility of peace talks in Southeast Asia, Kennedy sources said, it is likely that the Senator's campaign will be more conciliatory toward the Administration but that he will continue to stress that the United States can do better.