

DEMOCRATS

Kennedy Creates a Free-for-All

Among the Democratic politicians across the U.S., Senator Edward Kennedy's "firm, final and unconditional" decision not to seek the presidency in 1976 brought forth a collective sigh of relief last week. The reasons were as varied as the conflicting emotions that the Kennedy name inspires.

Most Americans could readily sympathize with the Senator's formal explanation. "My primary responsibilities are at home," he said, and they are undeniably heavy. His wife Joan, an out-patient at a West Coast clinic who was at his side during his press conference, has

The announcement also spared the nation—and Teddy—a prolonged controversy over Chappaquiddick, a lingering but explosive issue that, politically, was probably the chief reason why Kennedy withdrew. There remain many unanswered questions about the 1969 death of Mary Jo Kopechne in Kennedy's car; Watergate revived them as a challenge to the Senator's moral fitness and the evenhandedness of the press. The problem was expressed in nasty bumper stickers: NOBODY DROWNED AT WATERGATE. The fact that several publications had renewed investigations into Chappaquiddick may well have affected the timing of Kennedy's announcement (see story page 31).

Though Kennedy was likely to gain the nomination if he reached for it and was perhaps better suited than anybody else to unify the Democrats' left and right wings, Chappaquiddick made it questionable that he would defeat Gerald Ford in 1976—unless the President stumbled badly, particularly in handling the economy. Already, some of the Kennedy allure had been lost; several Democratic candidates had suggested that they did not want Kennedy's campaign help this year. Said Monte Pascoe, Colorado state Democratic chairman, about Kennedy's withdrawal: "It was a healthy thing for the party."

No Front Runners. As long as Kennedy was a potential candidate, no new liberal contenders could come to the fore. After his pullout, the quest for the Democratic nomination was wide open. "There are no front runners now," insisted Democratic Senator Henry ("Scoop") Jackson, "and a lot more people are going to be coming in." Beyond giving all aspirants a better chance, Kennedy's exodus did not noticeably benefit any potential candidate. Minnesota's Senator Walter ("Fritz") Mondale, 46, whose liberal voting record is nearly identical to Kennedy's, claimed a special boost. But the self-effacing Mondale has sparked little enthusiasm for his all-but-announced candidacy.

Alabama's Governor George Wallace, 55, a distant second to Kennedy among Democratic voters,* may be in a better position to play his special spoiler role in the party. But just how many of the blue-collar laborers who have shown a perplexing affinity for both Kennedy and Wallace will now find the Governor appealing as a serious presidential prospect is unknown.

Jackson, 62, has moved skillfully to

*Taken just before Kennedy's withdrawal, a Gallup poll of Democratic voters showed Kennedy leading Wallace, 46% to 16%, with no other candidate getting more than 9%. The poll also tabulated preferences with Kennedy out of the race. The results: Wallace, 27%; Muskie, 17%; McGovern, 17%; Jackson, 14%; McCarthy, 7%; Proxmire, 5%; Mondale, 2%; undecided, 11%.

solidify labor support by assailing the oil companies and attacking Republican economic failures. His all-out advocacy of Israeli interests and Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union have helped ensure support from Jewish financial backers. Uniquely, Jackson has managed to criticize aspects of détente, such as nuclear-arms limitations, and thus exploit residual opposition to that policy. But his pro-Pentagon positions have antagonized liberals. Many Kennedyites may join in a stop-Jackson movement if he emerges as the clear front runner. That is the chief hope of Texas' suave and conservative Senator Lloyd Bentsen, 53. Though he has been farther to the right than Jackson, he has been consciously moving toward the center.

Solitary Decision. The freshest prospects may come from among the Democratic Governors: Florida's Reubin Askew, 46, who insists that he has no national aspirations; Ohio's John Gilligan, 53, who faces a stern re-election race; and Arkansas' Dale Bumpers, 49, who defeated Senator J.W. Fulbright in the Democratic senatorial primary. If Congressman Hugh Carey, 55, ends a 16-year Republican lock on the governorship of New York, he too would gain national recognition.

Kennedy had been brooding over leaving the field since July. He reached his decision in solitude, during the Labor Day congressional recess in late August. He talked his plans over with members of his family; none objected, most were pleased. At a family cookout on Aug. 31, Kennedy told his former administrative assistant, David Burke, who played devil's advocate and raised counterarguments. "He wasn't asking for advice by that time," recalls one Kennedy friend. "He was saying, 'This is my decision. Now let's hear the arguments against it.'" None of the arguments proved to be persuasive.

Whether Kennedy will play any role at all in 1976 is not at all clear. Certainly, his disavowal of his candidacy was as definitive as could be. "There is absolutely no circumstance or event that will alter the decision," he said. "I will not accept the nomination. I will not accept a draft. I will oppose any effort to promote my candidacy." But has he forever renounced the Oval Office?

"I have seen the importance of the presidency in a very personal way," he told TIME Washington Correspondent Stanley Cloud last week. "I have seen the enormous kinds of opportunities to shape events and move ideas and lead a country. These things are indeed impressive." While the Kennedy mystique may fade by 1980 or 1984, so too may his personal troubles and the public interest in Chappaquiddick, though it is hard to see how he can ever completely rid himself of that stigma. Kennedy could even make a bid as late as 1992. At 60, he would still be younger than Gerald Ford will be if, as expected, the President seeks election in 1976.



KENNEDY AT PRESS CONFERENCE
Firm, final and unconditional.

been hospitalized for emotional and other problems. Their son Teddy, who celebrated his 13th birthday last week, is going periodically to a Georgetown hospital for chemotherapy to check the cancer that has already cost him a leg. Kennedy is also a substitute father for the 13 children of his murdered brothers, Jack and Robert.

There was relief, too, because the withdrawal reduced the possibility that some madman might attempt a third Kennedy assassination. By coincidence, word leaked out last week that both the Boston police and Secret Service had been warned of a plot to kidnap either of the two Robert Kennedy sons attending Harvard. At President Ford's direction, they were temporarily placed under Secret Service protection; only President Kennedy's 13-year-old son legally qualifies for such surveillance.