

Pressure Is on Kennedy

WASHINGTON — Sen. Edward M. Kennedy is being propelled into the forefront of the Democratic presidential race — whether he wants it or not.

It is not his own doing. Events are thrusting him into the middle of this Democratic melee.

CANDIDATES are dropping away but none is coming near to getting a lock on the nomination.

This means that it is near certainty that the convention will turn into a bitter, lacerating process of shifting delegate combinations, and this spells frustration.

Facing such frustration, party leaders are already turning wishful eyes on the most alluring Democrat in their ranks and if frustration becomes an early stalemate, the heat on Sen. Kennedy will be terrific.

It will pose a crucial dilemma for Kennedy. It is the kind of dilemma most politicians relish. I suspect it is giving him no pain.

The senator's dilemma is this:

When he was running for re-election to his Senate seat in 1970, he told Massachusetts voters that he would serve his full term of six years.

He has repeatedly over the last year-and-a-half said he "would not seek nor run for any office this year."

He has cited "family obligation" as one reason and he hasn't mentioned the other — that 1972 might not be a good year for a Kennedy or for any other Democratic presidential nominee.

But can an important political figure who has been a beneficiary of party favors decide entirely by himself when it is good for him to be his party's candidate? Gov. Adlai Stevenson had to say yes in 1952

though he tried to say no.

Can Sen. Kennedy reject the nomination from his party when it decides it wants him and expect to receive the nomination some other time when he decides he wants it?

I have believed from the start that Kennedy was being absolutely direct and meant what he said when he has stated that he "would not run for any office this year." He has not sought the nomination and my guess is that he will not yield to pressure to take it. If this offends the party leaders, so be it; he will leave the political future to take care of itself.

But if a weary deadlock does not develop at the Miami convention, the pressure on Kennedy will not vanish. There is not a probable nominee, whether it be Humphrey, McGovern or Muskie, who would not want, welcome and value the senator as his running mate.

Could he be persuaded to accept? I'm not sure he couldn't.

He would not have sought any nomination and he would be clearly responding to a valid call of his party.

Running as vice-presidential nominee would undoubtedly benefit Kennedy and defeat, if it should come, would not impair his future.

His very acceptance would increase his party's debt to him and virtually assure future presidential nomination.

He would gain valuable experience and national exposure.

THE CONCERN and questions arising out of Chappaquiddick would be pushed further into the background.

These are the arguments that will be made to Kennedy. They could be persuasive.