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KENNEDY'S CAREER FEARED IMPERILED

Friends Express Concern Over Accident's Effects

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, July 20 —

Senator Edward M. Kennedy's automobile accident yesterday has created deep concern among his friends that the event will damage his political future.

That concern was expressed privately here by some of them. And it was evidenced by the general curtain of silence that descended on aides and associates who were asked for more information on the accident and why the Senator had not reported it earlier to the police.

Friends and staff members were generally not available to answer questions about the accident, which resulted in the drowning of Mary Jo Kopechne, a 28-year-old Washington woman. Those close to the Kennedys who could be reached would not comment on details of a party that preceded the accident.

They declined to give a full list of who was at the party, to say how many persons were there or to talk about what had happened. They also declined to give any further information on Mr. Kennedy's movements after the accident.

Burke Marshall, the civil rights chief in the Justice Department when Robert F. Kennedy was Attorney General, who is a close friend of Edward Kennedy, went to Hyannis

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Port this morning and was in the Kennedy compound.

Sources said Mr. Marshall, now an executive of the International Business Machines Corporation, had instructed staff members not to answer questions publicly or privately on the grounds that the Senator's legal position might be damaged.

The Massachusetts Democrat always cloaked his desire to run for the Presidency in 1972, but there was little doubt in the minds of most Washington observers that he would eventually step forward.

Whether this has all changed remains to be seen. But there was widespread speculation in the capital that Senator Kennedy's failure to report the accident to the police immediately, and other aspects of the case, could be detrimental to his political career unless they were immediately clarified.

Richard C. Drayne, the Senator's press secretary, told reporters this afternoon that Mrs. Ethel Kennedy, Robert Kennedy's widow, would have a statement.

Reached at her Hyannis Port home, Mrs. Kennedy said Miss Kopechne was "a terrific girl. She was a sweet girl and a wonderful girl."

The late Senator had "relied a lot on her," Mrs. Kennedy

said. "She was close to the family."

Mrs. Kennedy said she would attend the funeral scheduled for Tuesday in Wilkes-Barre, Pa., Miss Kopechne's birthplace. Mrs. Kennedy would not comment on the accident.

Miss Kopechne worked in a top secret room of Robert Kennedy's campaign headquarters in Washington. In the room, known as the "boiler room," trusted campaign workers attempted to compile accurate counts of how delegates to the Democratic National Convention would vote.

Staffers Were Close

The small group of campaign staffers became quite close. There was a gathering of the group last year on Cape Cod for a weekend of sailing shortly after the New York Senator was killed.

About a month ago, the old "boiler room" workers held a party here, according to one source.

The man in charge of the "boiler room" was David Hackett, a close friend of former President John F. Kennedy. Sources said Mr. Hackett did not attend the party on Chappaquiddick Island, near Martha's Vineyard, Friday night.

At the White House today, President Nixon refused to be drawn into a discussion of the

accident, he told reporters: "I don't know anything about it."

The Senate majority leader, Mike Mansfield of Montana, said after Sunday services at the White House that he did not believe the accident would hurt the political career of Senator Kennedy, who this year, the age of 38, became majority whip.

"After all, even a politician is human," Senator Mansfield said. "He has my full confidence."

Mr. Mansfield added: "We've been very lucky to have him in the leadership. He's been a great help me. It [the accident] could happen to any one of us."

Mr. Mansfield said he had talked on the telephone with the Kennedy office, but had not talked personally with the Senator.

Goodell Asks Space Cutback

WASHINGTON, July 19 (UPI)

—Senator Charles E. Goodell, Republican of New York, called Saturday for steep cutbacks in the manned space program after the Apollo moon shots are completed. "I just don't think it's worth the cost we put into it," Mr. Goodell said. "We have too many other programs in this country that urgently demand money."