

MARY McGRORY

## Suddenly Liberals Realize Ted Was Their Best Friend

WASHINGTON—Just a month ago, Sen. Edward M. Kennedy was at the top of the wave. On June 26, he spoke to the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee dinner at the Washington Hilton, and he was the great man of the occasion. Former Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey had paid his usual tribute to the heroes of the past—Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, John F. Kennedy and “yes, Lyndon B. Johnson.”

Sen. Edmund S. Muskie of Maine had made a few witticisms about the Republicans. Sen. Eugene J. McCarthy of Minnesota was not there.

Teddy made his way to the platform in a glare of lights and waves of applause.

His assignment was to introduce the Senate majority leader, Mike Mansfield, and he did it absolutely straight. Not a word about politics, past or future, just the “facts” about Mansfield, whose regard is reciprocated.

His men beamed on him, proud that his performance had been impeccable, the muted, restrained expression of a man who does not need to lift a finger to be his party's nominee.

One of them said the only thing was that things were moving so fast so far, that there was “an inevitability” about the nomination, which might not be a desirable thing, depending on the circumstances in 1972.

The “inevitability” is now over. The senator's political survival is now in question. The first shock of sympathy for him and his family was dissipated in a flood of questions.

Among those most stricken, ironically, are the Democratic liberals who were always a bit patronizing about the last of the Kennedys.

The new left regarded Teddy as an old politician, and held him at arm's length. Now they have made an agonizing reappraisal, and they are grieving as deeply as the Kennedy cultists.

Teddy cares about the things they care about, the war and the military-industrial complex. He had never spoken out to their satisfaction on Chicago or campus troubles, but he was beginning to take risks.

The youthful element of the party which clung to Sen. McCarthy, whose efforts “to discourage a personality cult” had begun to take effect, took a new look at Teddy Kennedy the day he lashed out at Hamburger Hill.

Kennedy reacted emotionally to the news about Hamburger Hill, and, uncharacteristically, he hurried over to the Senate floor and denounced the action as “senseless and irresponsible.”

Sen. Hugh Scott, the Republican whip, attacked him for questioning military wisdom; the White House responded, the military commanders in Saigon began justifying themselves. Teddy stood alone in the rain for several days until the mail began pouring into his office telling him he was right.

He followed up this boldness with another. He flew out to California and marched with the grape-strikers.

He has been a leader in the fight against the anti-ballistic missile system. He stood with Mansfield for tax reform.

What happens to that voice now? And who will speak for the liberals with that resonance that Kennedy had?

The liberals had once hoped to keep Teddy Kennedy honest, now just hope they can keep him alive. Belatedly, and all of a sudden, they realize he was the best friend they had.