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Kennedy Expects to Back Johnson Despite Differences on War

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SAN FRANCISCO, Jan. 4—

Senator Robert F. Kennedy said today that he could back President Johnson for re-election this year despite their disagreement over the war in Vietnam.

"And that's what I expect to do," the New York Democrat told an overflow crowd of 1,020 members and guests of the Commonwealth Club of California. "I can still support a man even though I disagree with him," Mr. Kennedy said.

The question of Senator Kennedy's "ambivalent policy" on the war and support of the President was posed during a question and answer period following a luncheon address at

the Sheraton-Palace Hotel. Politics and the war dominated the queries.

Mr. Kennedy was asked if a Republican victory would be guaranteed in 1972 by the re-election of Mr. Johnson this year.

"I don't think so," the Senator began. "A lot depends on who the candidate is in 1972."

Neutrality Proclamation

When the applause and laughter over this obvious reference to his purported Presidential plans four years hence had died down he produced more by adding: "I'm not pushing anybody."

Asked if the New York State Democratic organization would support President Johnson this

year, the Senator said Mr. Johnson "hasn't announced he will run yet" but added that the state organization would support him if he did.

Questioners asked about the effects on the 1968 campaign of the candidacy of former Gov. George C. Wallace of Alabama and of the apparent qualification in California of the left-wing Peace and Freedom party.

"If Richard Nixon is the [Republican] candidate," Senator Kennedy responded, "Wallace would weaken the Republican party. If it were a different kind of candidate—if Governor Rockefeller were the candidate — I think Governor Wallace would hurt the Democrats."

His reference to Governor

Rockefeller started a ripple of hand clapping that burst into loud applause when the Senator added with a grin, "I'm not pushing him on it."

"The Peace and Freedom party," Mr. Kennedy said, "would hurt Gene McCarthy here in California." This was a reference to Senator Eugene J. McCarthy, Minnesota Democratial primaries, including California's.

Mr. Kennedy, having once more declared his support for President Johnson this year, said that 1972 was too far away for him to make a judgment about his own plans.

Mr. Kennedy, chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Indian Education, came to California with Senator Paul Fannin of Arizona, ranking Republican member of the subcommittee, for a series of hearings and visits to reservations and schools.

While here, however, he met with Robert L. Coate, Northern California Democratic chairman, and with a number of other Democrats at a luncheon arranged by Mr. Coate.

Among those on hand were Attorney General Thomas C. Lynch, who will head a pro-Johnson ticket of National Convention delegates on the June 4 California Presidential primary ballot; Representative John V. Tunney, Democrat of California; William Orrick, formerly of the Federal Department of Justice, and Ann Alanson, national committeewoman.