

## JOHNSON AGREES TO CONFER WITH KENNEDY

## PRESIDENT HAILED

## Senator Conciliatory in Wire, but Pledges to Continue Race

Transcript of Kennedy News Conference on Page 28.

By JOHN HERBERS

President Johnson agreed yesterday to a request by Senator Robert F. Kennedy for a face-to-face meeting "to discuss how we might work together in the interest of national unity during the coming months."

The Senator suggested the meeting in a wire to the White House in which he said the President's decision not to seek re-election was "truly magnanimous."

The President, informed of the Kennedy wire on his way back to Washington from a speech in Chicago, told reporters he would "surely" honor the Senator's request and at a time "convenient for him."

Before receiving a reply to his telegram, however, Senator Kennedy announced that he would continue his campaign for the Presidency as before, stressing the need for "peace abroad" and "reconciliation at home."

## Resumes Campaigning

Senator Kennedy described President Johnson's reduction of the American military effort in Vietnam as a "step toward peace." He made it clear, however, that whatever the outcome of the war he would not depart from his campaign theme that America could "do better" under his leadership than it had under President Johnson.

The 42-year-old Senator made his views known at a crowded, chaotic news conference in the Overseas Press Club 12 hours after President Johnson's surprise announcement on national television that he would not seek or accept the Presidential nomination.

A few hours later Senator Kennedy resumed his campaigning as scheduled before the President disclosed his decision. He flew to Philadelphia for a tour of that city and its suburbs, and planned to speak at a rally in Camden, N. J.

In Philadelphia the Senator sounded a conciliatory note in marked contrast to his recent criticism of the Johnson Administration.

In a speech prepared for de-

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livery at Camden, he said critics of the war would "respect and honor President Johnson, who has sought to take the first step toward peace. They will support his efforts to move toward negotiations."

The candidate's eyes were red from lack of sleep when he arrived for the news conference at 10 A.M. With him were his wife, Ethel, bright-eyed in a vermillion coat, Theodore Sorensen, one of his chief advisers,

The Senator had arrived in New York Sunday night after an eight-day tour of the nation. He learned of the President's decision when he stepped from his plane at Kennedy airport.

Senator Kennedy opened the news conference by announcing that he had sent the following telegram to President Johnson during the night:

"Mr. President: First of all let me say that I fervently hope that your new efforts toward peace in Vietnam will succeed. Your decision regarding the Presidency subordinates self to country and is truly magnanimous. I respectfully and earnestly request an opportunity to visit with you as soon as possible to discuss how we might work together in the interest of national unity during the coming months. Sincerely, Robert F. Kennedy."

## 'Courage and Generosity'

Then he told his audience that "the President's actions reflect both courage and generosity of spirit." Later, asked what questions he might put to the President, Mr. Kennedy said:

"I don't know that it'll be a matter of asking questions. Basically, I think that whatever contribution that I can make, in trying to find a peaceful solution in Vietnam, bringing national unity at home, is what I would like to do."

Asked to comment on President Johnson's decision to stop the bombing of most of North Vietnam in an effort to reach a negotiated peace, Senator Kennedy said:

"I think this is a step toward peace, but as the Chinese proverb says, the journey toward peace is a thousand miles."

In his campaign speeches, Senator Kennedy had proposed that the United States stop bombardment of the north, reduce the military effort in other ways, require the South Vietnamese to assume a greater

share of the war's burden, negotiate with the National Liberation Front, and seek to establish a coalition government.

## A Move Toward Critics

Thus, the Senator pointed out, the President was moving in the direction that he and other critics of the war had long advocated.

But he added that Vietnam would obviously continue to be an issue for some time and indicated that new approaches were needed in both foreign and domestic policies.

"As we move toward a political resolution of the agonies of Vietnam," he said, "we can start to redirect our national energy and resources towards the vital problems of our own national community."

"The crisis of our cities," he went on, "the tension among our races, the complexities of a society at once so rich and so deprived—all these call urgently for the best effort of all Americans all across this country. We must reach across the false barriers that divide us from brothers and from countrymen to seek and find peace abroad, reconciliation at home and participation in the life of our country."

"I intend to look to the future," he said. "I think as I pointed out at various times, this is a campaign not just for 1967, not just a question of the end of this year. This is a campaign that's going to determine the direction of the United States in the 1970's."

The Senator's face was serious and lacked its usual animation as he answered questions in the small, second-floor room packed with reporters, photographers, television crews and spectators who had wandered in from the street. There was frequent confusion as several persons tried to ask questions at once.

## Appears Still Dazed

Mr. Kennedy appeared still somewhat dazed by the surprise from the night before.

"As far as I'm concerned," he said, "I think that it's a long road to Chicago and it's a long road to November. I think we've seen just over the period of the last six weeks what can happen in political life and what can happen in one's life."

He did not know what Vice President Humphrey would do, he said, and he did not know what political leaders would join him or what would happen between him and Senator Eugene J. McCarthy.

"I think it's too early to be able to predict what's going to

happen," he said. "I'm going to make an effort, I'm going to go around the country, I'm going to state what I feel needs to be done for our people."

The rhythm shifted yesterday at Senator Robert F. Kennedy's New York headquarters, Madison Avenue and 38th Street.

The switchboard in front of Betty Fisher blinked at a call-a-minute pace. About half of the calls were messages for the professional politicians whose plasterboard offices were on the balcony of the noisy

quarters.

"On Friday and Saturday," Mrs. Fisher said between calls, "it was dead."

The mood amid the volunteers on the floor—leggy girls in miniskirts, young men with schoolbooks piled beside their feet—was different.

"There's less work and more talk today," said Jed Key, a New York University Law School student who is helping with publicity.

"We're sort of worried," said one girl "that there might be some complacency now that President Johnson is out."

# Excerpts From the Transcript of Senator Kennedy's News Conference

Following are excerpts of Senator Robert F. Kennedy's news conference at the Overseas Press Club in New York yesterday, as recorded by The New York Times:

Last night I—last night I sent to the President the following telegram:

"Mr. President: First of all let me say that I fervently hope that your new efforts toward peace in Vietnam will succeed. Your decision regarding the Presidency subordinates self to country and is truly magnanimous. I respectfully and earnestly request an opportunity to visit with you as soon as possible to discuss how we might work together in the interest of national unity during the coming months. Sincerely Robert F. Kennedy."

That wire sums up much of what I want to say today. The President's actions reflect both courage and generosity of spirit. In these past 16 days, I have been in 18 states—North, South, East and West.

## Sees Push Forward

In Alabama and in Watts, New York and in New Mexico, in Washington, D. C., and in Washington State, wherever I went, I found Americans of all ages and colors and political beliefs deeply desirous of peace in Vietnam and reconciliation at home.

Despite all the discord and disspirit, despite all of the extremists and their actions, there remains in this country today an enormous reservoir of hope and goodwill.

Americans want to move forward. They want to bet-

ter their community, make this country not only more livable for all Americans but a shining example for all of the world.

To free their energies and progress at home, they want peace in Vietnam produced not by surrender of either side but by a negotiated settlement that realistically takes into account the need for all Vietnamese and only Vietnamese to determine the future of their own country.

I've long urged that we make the first step in this direction by a de-escalation of our military effort, halting the bombing of the North, insisting upon reforms in the South and pressing for negotiation with all parties looking toward a transfer of the present conflict from the military to the political arena.

I am hopeful that the actions announced by the President will prove to be a step toward peace.

It is obviously a critical time and I think it would be inappropriate to offer any detailed comment regarding those actions at this time.

As we move toward a political resolution of the agonies of Vietnam, we can start to redirect our national energy and resources towards the vital problems of our own national community.

## A Call for Best Effort

The crisis of our cities, the tension among our races, the complexities of a society at once so rich and so deprived—all these call urgently for the best effort of all Americans all across this country.

We must reach across the

false barriers that divide us from brothers and from countrymen to seek and find peace abroad, reconciliation at home and the participation in the life of our country. That is the deepest desire of the American people and the truest expression of our national goals.

In this spirit I will continue my campaign for the Presidency of the United States.

Q. Senator Kennedy, doesn't the withdrawal of President Johnson rather place you in a position of shadow-boxing with an unknown candidate which might be backed by the President or fighting with a man who shares your views like Senator McCarthy for the nomination?

A. Well, I believe the President made it quite clear in his statement that he was going to remain out of politics during the remainder of his term. Secondly, I'm going to the American people as I have and present my views and my ideas about what we need to do in the future, what has to be accomplished here within our own country—to break down the barriers, to break down the discord and to bring unity and peace at home as well what needs to be done in our relationship with other countries.

## After Vietnam War

I think we have to remember that even after Vietnam, we are going to have to live in peace with countries and peoples all over the globe. It's going to be a difficult time. Let's control the spread of nuclear weapons

and weapons of mass destruction. I think these are matters which I feel strongly, the American people feel strongly and which I intend to discuss during the course of this campaign.

Q. Senator, do you intend to change your strategy at all in the campaigning. Will you continue to talk against our conduct or will you now leave the issue of Vietnam.

A. Well, I think the question of Vietnam and the direction that we have to move in Vietnam is always going to be a question before the American people. And obviously a lot can happen over the period of the next few weeks and the next few months. It's always going to be a matter of concern to the American people until peace comes to that land. As I said in my statement, I think that this is a step in that direction. I've outlined at various times the steps that I feel need to be taken. Some of these steps have been taken. And I think this is an important initiative toward peace.

Q. Senator, if the North Vietnamese, sir, use this, the halt—the halt in bombing—use this to increase their military activity, would you reconsider your thinking on cessation of bombing North Vietnam again?

A. I've answered that question at various times before. And as I said in my statement, I think it's not—could not serve a useful purpose at this time. . . . Senator . . . A. . . . in view of the President's statement last night to go into any details in those matters.

Q. Senator, in a real sense—in a real sense, Senator, President Johnson and his record have been the big issue in your campaign and even in Senator McCarthy's campaign. Does this mean that you're going to have to put a different effort to some of your campaigning?

Q. Senator do you think that the President is draftable, and second, a lot of people think you're now the front runner—What is your own evaluation of your position?

A. Well, number 1, I take the President at his word that he is not going to run and that he's not going to submit to a draft and I accept that and I believe the rest of the country will. . . . As far as I'm concerned, personally, I think that it's a long road to Chicago and it's a long road to November. I think we've seen just over the period of the last six weeks what can happen in political life and what can happen in one's life. So I think it's too early to be able to predict what's going to happen. I'm going to make an effort. I'm going to go around the country. I'm going to state what I feel needs to be done for our own people.

Q. Senator, you said a moment ago that you felt that we could have a useful debate in the upcoming months. With the President's personality removed and the policy that he advocated, what are you and Senator McCarthy going to debate? What issues can you debate?

What Needs To Be Done

A. Well, I think that there is not only what we should

do—I'm not talking about just debating with Senator McCarthy, but just debating and discussing really with the American people as to what needs to be done. I don't think that that's the only problem, obviously. I think Vietnam eventually is going to disappear in any case but we're still going to have the undeveloped nations of the world. We're going to have the population of Latin America, which is going to double over the period of the next several decades. We're going to have the fact that such tremendous poverty of seven out of 10 children will die before the age of 1. There are more people illiterate in Latin America now than there were when we began the Alliance for Progress because of the tremendous population increase. What are we going to do about those countries? Just a few years ago we were worried about Cuba. We still have the problem of Latin America not only from our relationship and close personal relationship we should have with those countries but a question of our national security. The whole continent of Africa, what direction is it going to move in. The fact that Europe obviously—the relationship of the European countries and the European community is changed dramatically vis-à-vis the United States. It will never be the same. It won't be the same as it was in the 1950's and it won't be the same as it was in the early 1960's. An election year is an opportunity to discuss what direction the United States should go in.