

The Future of Edward Kennedy

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WASHINGTON, June 6—The death of Robert F. Kennedy has thrust on the young shoulders of his brother Edward two great burdens: The leadership of his extraordinary family, and the stewardship of its extraordinary political tradition. There is no question that the Massachusetts Senator will readily accept the first responsibility, and there are only frail doubts that he will accept the second.

There were some persons here today who thought that the cumulative grief caused by the assassinations of his brothers, John, the President, and Robert the New York Senator, might prove too much for him. These persons believed that Edward Kennedy might even withdraw in justifiable anguish from the political field, which has been so costly to his family and spirit.

But the majority of those who know him felt otherwise. In London today, an aide who was representing the Massachusetts Democrat at a conference, said he thought Mr. Kennedy would carry on in politics. The aide, Dale de Hanan, added:

"The Kennedys are dedicated to their country and I think Edward Kennedy will carry on with the dedication of his brothers. This is a trait of their family. It is the way they are and I think he will continue in the tradition of his family."

Humphrey-Kennedy Ticket?

Most of the Senator's colleagues were with him today in California, but those who could be reached for comment about his political future unanimously agreed that, at the very least, he would stand for re-election when his Senate term expires in 1970.

Meanwhile, there was talk among Republican and Democratic politicians that he might join, or be invited to join, Vice President Humphrey on a Humphrey-Kennedy ticket.

Mr. Kennedy is, at 36, old enough to be Vice President under the terms of the Constitution. He is popular with his senior Democratic colleagues in the Senate, having built a reputation as a thorough legislator of unusual persistence. And he would bring to such a ticket the ineluctable magic of his name.

There are drawbacks to such an alliance, too. Critics contend that he is not particularly well known in the Democratic party structure and that he has not yet to demonstrate the public

charisma of his brother Robert of the intellect of his brother John.

Yet the fact that such an alliance has even been mentioned is in itself suggestive of the distance Mr. Kennedy has traveled since his entrance into the Senate in the fall of 1963. He won a special election that year to fill the seat vacated by President Kennedy.

Edward Kennedy started slowly. Republican critics disdainfully referred to him as "Jack Kennedy's bonus baby." This was an image reinforced by campaign revelations that he had been expelled from Harvard for cheating and by his sponsorship — which he ultimately abandoned — of an old political friend, Francis X. Morrissey, for a Federal judgeship.

Embarrassed by the Morrissey episode, Mr. Kennedy turned his career on Capitol Hill into an exercise in political humility, working hard in committee, building a competent staff, shunning public appearances, and concentrating almost exclusively on prosaic but important matters affecting his home state — transportation, the financial difficulties of Northeast Airlines and the import challenge facing Massachusetts' textile mills.

Mr. Kennedy's reputation grew modestly, and by 1967 he had become one of the Senate's most active legislators.

In that year, he assumed command of Senate forces seeking to overhaul the Selective Service System. He also fought repeatedly for administrative liberalization of the Immigration Act—for which he had been the Senate floor manager in 1965—battled for stiff gun control curbs, and, with Senator Howard H. Baker Jr. of Tennessee, helped destroy a powerful Congressional effort to overturn the Supreme Court's "one-man, one-vote" redistricting decision.

Mr. Kennedy is an adequate speaker, and his flat, nasal Kennedy accent carries punch and attracts listeners.

But his forte is careful research combined with sheer stubbornness, two traits that served him well during the bitter fight over Congressional redistricting last year.

Mr. Kennedy's performance helped to win Senate approval of language that more nearly reflected the letter and spirit of the Court's decision. But the battle was far from over.

A House-Senate conference committee accepted the original House version, then returned it to the Senate for approval.

Again Mr. Kennedy fought, and again he prevailed. The attempt to delay enforcement of the Court's decision died shortly thereafter.

Mr. Kennedy's staff reflects his combination of persistence and thoroughness. When K. Dun Gifford, a young Harvard-trained lawyer left the Department of Housing and Urban Development to join the staff in early 1966, Mr. Kennedy told him to become an expert on the military draft.

As a result, when the Selective Service system came up for renewal last year, Mr. Kennedy was able to take charge of the forces urging radical revision, including the drafting of 19-year-olds first, the establishment of a lottery, and the imposition of uniform national standards that would apply to all draft boards and eliminate regional inequities.

He lost the draft fight, but Mr. Gifford returned to the drawing board and on Feb. 29, 1968, Mr. Kennedy presented a 150-page measure that some observers think will form the basis of any future revision in the system.

Quiet on Big Issues

The Massachusetts Democrat has said relatively little about some of the great, broad issues of the day—civil rights and the problems of the cities, for example. He has left these issues as well as any frontal attack on the Administration's policies in Vietnam to his brother.

Instead, he has emphasized in speeches and in hearings the consequences of the war. He has argued, for example, that the Administration must show greater compassion for refugees and the civilian casualties of the fighting.

In January, however, Mr. Kennedy hinted that he would soon begin to broaden the scope of his criticism to embrace not only the human and social consequences of the war but also the assumptions behind it and the course it is taking.

"I think," he said, "that we ought to modify the pursuit of our objectives in that country to much more of a clear-and-hold operation, in the sense that we're protecting the civilian population and we're reducing the total number of troop losses."

If his thinking begins to broaden on the war issue, so will it broaden, observers believe, on other issues. For he alone among the Kennedys remains to confront the great challenges of the day.