

KENNEDY DECRIES LAOS OPERATION

Says 'Nightmare' Ended in
a 'Humiliating Retreat'

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WASHINGTON, March 25—
Senator Edward M. Kennedy today described the South Vietnamese incursion into Laos as "a nightmare" that has ended in a "humiliating retreat" carried out "so obviously in panic."

Speaking to a meeting of Democratic state chairmen, Mr. Kennedy bitterly attacked the Nixon Administration's support of the Laos operation and its entire conduct of the Indochina war.

"For millions of American people," he said, "the vision of the Laos operation is scores of American helicopters shot down, the highest American casualty rates in many weeks, and American troops refusing a command to engage the enemy."

"Above all, the vision is of South Vietnamese soldiers in headlong flight, desperately pleading for the rescue of the American helicopters that would carry them to safety, while American airmen just as desperately push them back to the ground to wait for the next mission and overloaded planes. America is coming out of Laos on the slides."

Attack on Moral Grounds

Like other prominent Democratic spokesmen in recent weeks — including Senator George S. McGovern of South Dakota, the only announced Democratic Presidential candidate for 1972 — Mr. Kennedy attacked the war not only on pragmatic grounds but also on moral grounds.

Neither President Nixon nor other American officials, the Massachusetts Democrat said, "asks how many Laotian people have been killed by the tons of bomb and rockets we have poured into that unhappy land."

"There were 50,000 civilian casualties in Laos even before the recent invasion," he continued. "How many will die in future similar adventures? Can America ever wash its hands of the innocent Asian blood it has spilled? Can we ever wash away the ugly racial connotation of this war?"

Although he has repeatedly said that he is not a Presidential candidate, and said today that he did not even plan to endorse a candidate, Mr. Kennedy was invited to appear before the state chairmen along with the potential nominees.

Humphrey to Be Host

Senator Hubert H. Humphrey of Minnesota will be the host at a breakfast for the chairman tomorrow morning, and Senators Edmund S. Muskie of Maine and Henry M. Jackson of Washington will speak during the day. Senator McGovern and Senator Birch Bayh of Indiana were invited but were unable to appear.

At this morning's meeting, Lawrence F. O'Brien, the party's national chairman, continued his campaign to persuade the television networks to give the Democrats time to respond to President Nixon's speeches.

He said that he planned to appeal within the next few days to the Federal Communications Commission and to the networks to provide time under the fairness doctrine to counter Mr. Nixon's recent television appearances. Mr. O'Brien said he would go to court if necessary.

He also said that a Democratic victory in 1972 was "possible," though not yet "probable." Senator Harold E. Hughes of Iowa, another potential Democratic Presidential nominee, agreed, asserting that "Mr. Nixon's on a long slide" toward defeat in 1972.

Mr. Hughes told the chairmen that the Nixon years had been "cold impersonal years, relying too much on computer efficiency and too little on compassion and human understanding." An appeal for compassion has been one of his main themes in recent speeches around the country.

He said that the Administration was vulnerable chiefly because of its performance on the war and on the economy, as well as what he called its failure to "bring us all together."