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Senator Kennedy Says No to '76

SINCE HE HIMSELF did not hesitate to say that if he had gone after the Democratic nomination for President in 1976, he would have been able to win it, Senator Edward M. Kennedy's announcement yesterday of his firm, final and unconditional decision not to run is for him no small retreat. The earlier Kennedys did not play the politics of withdrawal and disengagement.

Yet the Massachusetts Senator's dropping out is fully understandable: he does have responsibilities to the families of his brothers, to his not robust wife and especially to his young son which would stand in the way of a full commitment to a campaign for the 1976 presidency. Also he does have the Chappaquiddick tragedy to look back at over his shoulder. "Were I to run it would have been a factor," Senator Kennedy conceded.

THE FRONT-RUNNER'S WITHDRAWAL leaves the Democratic race suddenly wide open. The entire crowded field now moves nearer the post position, all the entrants apparently delighted that a Kennedy is not in their lane. Senator Henry M. Jackson, one of the leading beneficiaries of yesterday's development and one of the strongest remaining contenders, exuberantly announced he will intensify his campaigning efforts. Senator Walter Mondale says the same. And others like Senator Lloyd Bentsen doubtless feel they can now see some daylight.

Yet the widening of the Democratic field by the subtraction of Kennedy will no doubt have the reciprocal effect of helping President Ford, who has no visible problem of gaining the Republican nomination but who would have experienced a considerable challenge in taking on a Kennedy ticket.