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Kennedy attack to backfire?

by Rowland Evans and Robert Novak

Washington - The influence of a private attack on Sen. Edward M. Kennedy by a deputy chairman of the Republican National Committee late last week has left some powerful Republican politicians chagrined and infuriated others.

Employing language seldom used even in the heat of an election campaign, deputy national chairman Lyn Nofziger lashed into Kennedy in a private memorandum distributed to Republican Congressmen as follows:

"The fact that a man with Sen. Kennedy's record of cheating, of lying, of cowardice and of ignoring the law could have the gall to level personal attacks against (President Nixon) never ceases to amaze me."

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... Some party leaders in Congress and some political operatives close to Mr. Nixon privately denounced the Nofziger assault as all but certain to boomerang against the Republicans and build sympathy for [EMK]. To these Republicans, moreover, Nofziger's brassnuckle attack signaled a consensus within the Republican party that Kennedy is a far stronger prospect today to be the Democratic Presidential nominee than at any time since the Chappaquiddick tragedy.

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Asking not to be quoted by name, one party leader said the White House was "shocked" by the most recent California poll (by Mervin D. Field) showing Kennedy beating Mr. Nixon in his home state by 45 per cent to 42 per cent. That "shock," he said, immediately penetrated the National Committee and may have prompted Nofziger's attack.

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... "A few more blasts at Kennedy like that" one Democratic politician told us, "will blast him right into the nomination."

(For other refs to Chappaquiddick, see memo attached to clipping above, Nix Ad.)