

## On Ted Kennedy And the Future

**I**N THIS COLUMN politics is almost invariably left to political experts, who must suffer association with politicians, but possibly a tentative political event as remote as 1976 will bear comment.

Senator Edward M. Kennedy talked to high school students at Westfield, Massachusetts. Senators and other politicians did not use to address school kids, but the kids now have the vote, and it isn't good political form to slight voters.

According to Associated Press, he told them he would not be a candidate for the Presidency this year, but added: "Wait and see about 1976."



Politicians and publicists across the land have been wondering about Kennedy and the forthcoming Democratic Convention. He has persistently denied his intent to seek the nomination, but many are skeptical, though there is good reason to believe him at this time. In public life, as in private, some situations do not dissipate rapidly.

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**A**LL AMERICANS ARE AWARE the Senator was struck by a political misfortune a few years ago at Chappaquiddick Bridge on Martha's Vineyard Island, when a young woman passenger in a car he was driving died.

All motorists know that anything can happen on the road in a split second, and it frequently does not involve moral turpitude.

So the mishap in itself is not the point. The point is he handled the tragedy very badly. He was understandably in shock and confused, but he permitted this confusion to remain for days, and even weeks, of aftermath, when the initial shock should have worn off.

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**I**N THIS HE WAS ABETTED by many friends and local officials spellbound by the glamour and place of the Kennedy name. It begot an atmosphere of evasion and cover-up disquieting to the people.

Thoughtful Americans believed the Senator had failed to cope with the reality of a personal crisis, and this was easily transformed to a larger question: if he cannot solve a personal crisis, could he solve a national crisis, which is central to the Presidential office and function?

In general the Senator is a logical man when dealing with the criss-cross of socio-political confrontation and in-fighting. But not all logical men are capable of logical action under severe stress, yet it is essential that we have a leader with the inner courage to conquer extraordinary stress in our national life.

This depressing doubt may diminish in the next four years. It may be that Chappaquiddick taught Edward Kennedy a lesson about himself, as adversity often does, and about public life. In a society free to choose its leaders, we cannot forever maintain a socio-political prejudice at its original level.

All this is Mr. Kennedy's problem, but it is also the people's problem, so long as he bears the potential of his name and his public judgments and acts.

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