

# Ted Faces Political Setback

By Robert Gruenberg

WASHINGTON — (CDN) — The political future of Sen. Edward M. (Ted) Kennedy was the hot topic of conversation here today, rivaling, or even exceeding, that of Apollo 11.

From the Capitol Hill cloakrooms to National Airport — where a young woman who stepped off a plane said, "that's all they spoke about, Teddy" — questions and speculation dominated the talk.

It was hard to find anyone who thought that the future of the 38 year old Kennedy was not dim as a result of the auto accident in which Mary Jo Kopechne, the 28 year old blonde Kennedy staff secretary, was drowned.

The sympathetic statement of Sen. Mike Mansfield (D-Mont.) when asked if Kennedy's political career was damaged seemed to attract few similar sentiments. Mansfield said:

"I don't think so, even a politician is human. The same thing could happen to anyone."

## 'He's Dead'

A Democratic politician called Mansfield's statement "damaging" and of Kennedy's political future, snapped, "He's dead!"

Another Democratic politician called the matter "a bad shot," and said "this has hurt his possibilities tremendously."

The most damaging aspect of the affair, it appeared, was the failure by Kennedy — for reasons not entirely clear yet—to report the accident immediately, or to try to get immediate help.

"If he goes into shock over something like this, can you trust him with the H-bomb?" asked one legislator.

Another said:

"I don't think a guy can expect to be President if he has to take 8 or 9 hours to report something like this to

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the police — then shows up with his lawyer and his cousin, and with a written statement."

## No Autopsy

The other damaging aspect of the Kennedy-Kopechne tragedy was the number of questions surrounding it that still remained to be answered.

The fact that an autopsy was not done on Miss Kopechne added to the feeling of disquiet about the manner of her death.

Also at question were the events leading up to it — from the time of the party for the Kennedy "boiler room" staff of the 1968 campaign to the plunge early Saturday off the narrow wooden bridge into a tidal pond between Martha's Vineyard and Chappaquiddick Island.

Other questions were raised about Kennedy's own actions and the circumstances surrounding him following the tragedy.

One congressional figure wanted to know whether police had found moisture or water in the back seat of the car in which Kennedy said he slumped after walking a mile and three quarters back to the cottage where the party was held.

## Other Questions

"Was there salt in his suit? That was a salt water creek," he said, referring to the senator's statement that he "dove" several times in an effort to rescue Miss Kopechne.

Another questioned why Kennedy did not stop at either of two cottages, reportedly well lit, which were close to the bridge.

Even allowing for the "shock" that Kennedy said

he suffered, "a prudent man would be shouting, screaming for help — trying to get everybody down to the water's edge," he said.

No matter what the verdict on the tragedy, it has become "a terrific weapon" in a whispering campaign that will engulf Kennedy should he have national political ambitions in 1972, or later, one politician added.

"It's not what the billboards say about you, or what the handbills say — but what they're saying about you on the streetcorners as you drive by, and in the taverns.

"It's a disaster" for Kennedy's presidential aspirations, said one of the highest political advisers of the AFL-CIO — traditionally strong supporter of Democratic presidential candidates.

Approximately 100 officials of the AFL-CIO's political arm, the Committee on Political Education, opened a major meeting at Piney Point, Md., to discuss state by state congressional races next year, including Kennedy's expected bid for re-election.

The consensus appeared to be Kennedy could win re-election to the Senate despite the auto accident, but was virtually ruled out of the presidential race in 1972.

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