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Kennedy Says the People Will Decide

By Jim Morse

Chappaquiddick, Watergate 1976 Presidential Issues

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WASHINGTON — Speak-

ing out for the first time on the effect the Watergate scandal may have on his political future, Sen. Edward M. Kennedy of Massachusetts said yesterday "the final judgment will have to be made by the people... the voters."

Also for the first time, Kennedy said in an exclusive interview that "some-time after 1974" he will make a declaration of his intentions relative to seeking the Democratic presidential nomination in 1976.

"There is a challenge for

leadership in this country today," he said. "We need to bring the country together again."

In speaking of the effect of Watergate on his future, Kennedy was referring to Chappaquiddick (although that word was not directly mentioned) and the widespread belief that because of Watergate, the morality issue will be a key point in the next presidential campaign.

From his reaction to the Watergate question, it was apparent that the senator will not attempt to duck the

issue of Chappaquiddick and that his ambitions, whatever they may be, are still alive.

He emphasized: "It's certainly a question that I personally am unable to answer. The judgment will be made by the people."

"Right now I have no plans for 1976. I will continue to serve in the Senate."

Open Door

"However, I realize there is considerable speculation about my possible candidacy. After the 1974 congressional elections, I will have to make my intentions

known."

This left the door open, which was in contrast to the senator's statements in the months prior to the 1972 Democratic Convention that "under no circumstances" would he be a candidate.

Kennedy said no special significance should be attached to his scheduled July Fourth speech in Alabama at a ceremony honoring Gov. George Wallace.

"I've spoken to all kinds of different groups in all sections of the country. I feel that as a member of the

Senate I ought to be able to travel in the South and talk to those who support Gov. Wallace. I'm entitled to present my views and beliefs, although there are some issues in which Gov. Wallace and I do not agree."

"There is a challenge for leadership in this country today. We need to bring the country together again, not look for issues to divide us. That's why I'm going to Alabama."

Looking tanned and rested, Kennedy freely discussed Watergate, but was

quick to emphasize he considered it unfair to judge President Nixon's role, if any, in the break-in and subsequent coverup "until all the evidence is in."

"At some time," Kennedy said, "it's apparent that the President became aware of what happened and that some of his top people were involved. He himself has indicated as much."

"But up to now, at least, there has been no direct evidence to tie him to Watergate. There should be a basic presumption in favor of the President, and for anyone, for that matter, until there is convincing evidence to the contrary."