



Senator Kennedy's Noble Experiment

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SENATOR Edward Kennedy's big decision has already filled acres of newspaper with commentary, analysis and explanation. All the same, nothing has been said about the really major experiment Senator Kennedy means to make, now that he has cut himself free of all the complications of a possible presidential candidacy.

"I want to see what I can really do as a free senator," he told this reporter. "When everyone thinks you may be going after the White House, you can't take a single step; you can't make any move at all, that isn't interpreted in terms of presidential politics. Getting away from that is what I mean by becoming a free senator."

"I've a lot to do, too. There's my health bill, first of all, that I've been working on for so long."

Put as simply as Senator Kennedy puts this new experiment he wants to make, the novelty and significance of his aim may escape most people. In fact, however, if Senator Kennedy succeeds in putting a Kennedy health bill on the statute books, he will have pulled off a feat without any real parallel in nearly three decades.

In order to grasp the novelty, you have to try to picture the U.S. Senate as it looked from the press gallery, when this reporter went to work there in 1936. The empty, sordid, posturing senatorial super-stars of the present would then have been laughed off the senate floor.

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THE super-stars of 1936 were of a different order. Perhaps the greatest was noble old George Norris of Nebraska, with his deceptive outward sweetness, his

splendid silver thatch, and his toughness in any fight for a good cause. All but single handed, he had saved Muscle Shoals, despite repeated, White House-supported grabs by the private power companies during the booming Republican years.

Then along came a change of climate and President Franklin Roosevelt. There was Senator Norris, the unique, unchallengeable authority, with his great bill for the Tennessee Valley Authority ready for instant action. His long, hard, obstinate fight, and above all, his years of work and study, were then rather promptly rewarded; and so the TVA became George Norris' marvelous enduring monument — a more enviable monument, in truth, than most past presidents can claim.

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Just why such splendid legislative fertility was then followed by verbose sterility, no one has yet explained satisfactorily. It is a hard fact, however, that the only major postwar statutes bearing senators' personal stamps are Robert A. Taft's Taft-Hartley act, and Lyndon B. Johnson's ever-memorable civil rights and voting rights act.

But President Johnson was a man of the center, and Senator Taft, surely, was an authentic man of the right. Meanwhile, the liberal Democratic senators of Senator Kennedy's group have been busy for over a quarter of a century with a game resembling the ballet. They are always striking the most beautiful attitudes, in other words, but when all is said and done, there is nothing left but air.

To try to break this boring pattern is the essence of Senator Kennedy's proposed experiment. Nothing could be more interesting.