

Kennedy, O'Neill Trip On Language Barrier

By David S. Broder

Washington Post Staff Writer

Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) and Rep. Thomas P. (Tip) O'Neill (D-Mass.) have this communication problem.

It's not easy to see why. They're both Irish Catholic Boston Democrats, of the liberal faith. O'Neill, the House majority leader, has the House seat John F. Kennedy used to hold, and Ted Kennedy is one of his constituents.

Both have a bit of a Boston brogue, but not so bad you can't understand them.

But oddly enough, every time Kennedy says, "No," it sounds to Tip O'Neill like he's saying "Yes."

Kennedy announced last autumn that under no circumstances would he be a candidate for the 1976 Democratic presidential nomination and there was no point in coaxing him.

Tip O'Neill promptly told anyone who would listen that he was sure Kennedy was running.

Kennedy lined up O'Neill as host of a fundraising event for his campaign for re-election to the Senate in 1976. O'Neill said he was even surer that Kennedy would be a presidential candidate.

Sunday, on the CBS interview program "Face the Nation," O'Neill was asked by another Boston Irishman, Martin F. Nolan of The Boston Globe, in that polite way they have up there, if "Kennedy is lying to you or to everybody else."

O'Neill said to cool off the perjury talk, Nolan, and listen for a bit. Then, with homey references to the senator's mother

and the senator's bride, he explained the way it is.

Kennedy, said O'Neill, is aching to be President. In fact, said O'Neill, "as I'm talking to you, I believe that Ted Kennedy is a candidate for the presidency." But the family is dead-set against it, and, of course, like any good son, Teddy does not want to go about upsetting his aged mother.

But, said O'Neill with a knowing look, "About a week or 10 days ago, as I was leaving him, I said, 'Ted, do you want me to say that you're not a candidate for the presidency?'"

"And he says, 'You know, keep me alive, Tip.'"

That would seem to cinch it. But hold on. Yesterday, Kennedy told The Washington Post there must have been a misunderstanding. He might have said something like that in banter with O'Neill, but of course, Tip should have known that he meant "keep me alive" as a candidate for re-election in Massachusetts.

A Boston source says that Kennedy's asking O'Neill's help in Massachusetts is about as plausible as Boston Red Sox centerfielder Fred Lynn asking Mayor Kevin White for batting tips.)

Kennedy said, "I wouldn't tell Sargent Shriver (his brother-in-law, who is running for the nomination himself) one thing and Tip O'Neill something else. I wouldn't send my sister (Eunice Shriver) around the country (for her husband) if I were going to run myself."

Kennedy was asked what he had said to O'Neill yesterday. "Nothing," he said.

Further bulletins are awaited.