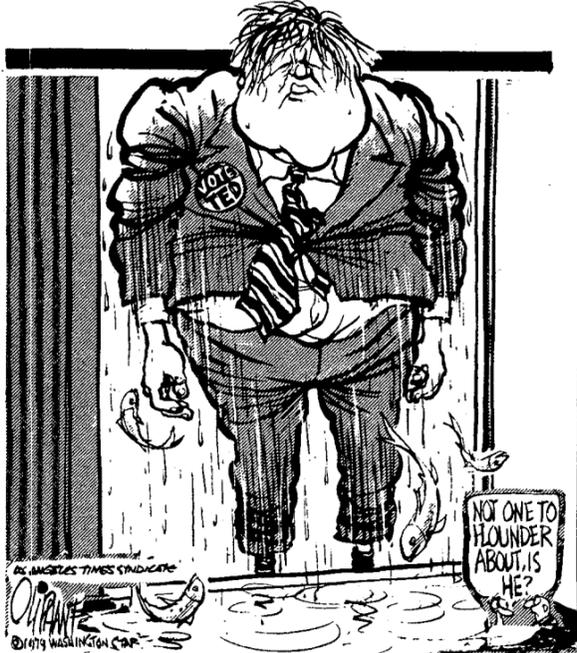


# THE INSIDE STORY



HI, THERE! PARDON MY APPEARANCE, BUT I WANT TO DISCUSS WITH YOU THE LACK OF LEADERSHIP IN THIS COUNTRY.

## Chappaquiddick is crucial to Kennedy losses

By Debbie Goldman and John Judis

Chappaquiddick, the small island off Martha's Vineyard, became famous July 18, 1969. That evening, according to Senator Edward Kennedy's testimony, he took a wrong turn while driving back from a party and drove his car off a small wooden bridge into an eight-foot-deep pond.

Kennedy escaped from the car. His passenger, Mary Jo Kopechne, did not.

Kennedy claims that he dove several times into the water trying to retrieve Kopechne. Then, he went back to the party, got two friends, and returned to the pond to dive for Kopechne. After 45 minutes, they gave up and went home. According to Kennedy, he then swam alone the 500-yard channel back to his motel.

Ten hours after the accident, Kennedy finally notified the police. Six days later, he pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor charge of having left the scene of an accident and was given a suspended sentence.

Doubts about Kennedy's version of the event continued to haunt him: why did Kennedy and Kopechne leave the party together? Were they the only people in the car? Why did Kennedy make the wrong turn? How did he get out of the car and not Kopechne? Could he have swum back across the channel's swift currents? Why did he wait 10 hours to report the accident? In 1976, Robert Sherrill's *The Last Kennedy*, an investigation of Chappaquiddick published the year previously, was supposed to have discouraged Kennedy from seeking the presidency.

But in 1980 Kennedy and his supporters hoped that Chappaquiddick had been put to rest.

It now appears that it has not. Moreover, it seems that doubts about Kennedy's character, judgment, morality, and ability in crises—which stem in large part from an evaluation of his behavior at Chappaquiddick—are a major, if not the major, reason for his failure at the polls.

### 13 percentage points.

Two recent polls have tried to assess the effect of Chappaquiddick on the Kennedy candidacy. A January 1980 *Newsweek* poll found that among the 21 percent of Democratic voters who believed he acted properly at Chappaquiddick he held a 38-to-27 percent lead over President Carter. Among the 55 percent who thought he

acted improperly, Carter held a 44-to-15 percent lead.

During the New Hampshire primary, the *Los Angeles Times* conducted a poll of Democratic voters to determine what effect Chappaquiddick had on their decision. Asked whether they thought it was important to consider Chappaquiddick in deciding who to support, 37 percent said it was important, while 63 percent said it was not. Among those who thought Chappaquiddick was important, Carter enjoyed an overwhelming lead.

According to William Schneider, who analyzed the *Times* survey, they tried to factor out those voters who thought Chappaquiddick was important, but would have voted for Carter anyway. When they did this, they found that 13 percent of the electorate had voted for Carter rather than Kennedy primarily because of Chappaquiddick.

Kennedy lost New Hampshire by .11 percentage points.

Interviews with voters in New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and Illinois have confirmed the *Times* conclusion. Repeatedly, voters who otherwise say they agree with Kennedy more than Carter or Anderson explain their decision to oppose Kennedy on the basis of his character, judgment, or morality. When queried further, they will inevitably cite Chappaquiddick—often along with Kennedy's having cheated at Harvard, his reputation as a "womanizer" and his wife's alcoholism.

•Dorothy Robey, a Chicago school teacher and a lifelong Democrat, is going to vote for Anderson, even though she distrusts his "conservative element." Asked about Kennedy, she says she likes his economic ideas much better than those of Carter or Anderson ("I think national health insurance is important") but she still cannot support him. "I guess it would have to come down to a moral turpitude that I suspect on his part," she explains. "The cheating, Chappaquiddick, I guess I've been influenced by what his wife has done and become."

•Herta Kresse, a Chicago city worker, insists that he prefers Kennedy to Carter on the economy, but says he will not vote for Kennedy. "If he don't remember what happens 20 hours later, how he going to remember to run the country," Kresse says, referring to Chappaquiddick.

•Jan Ellison, a Rochester, N.H., store clerk, won't vote for Carter, but will probably vote for Brown rather than Kennedy, even though she dislikes Brown's unequivocal opposition to nuclear power. Asked why she won't support Kennedy, she explains, "You can cross him off. If there's such a thing as sincerity and honesty in politics, that's what we need."

•Joseph Vogel, a Hamilton, Mass., seminary student, who is black and considers himself a Democrat, is nevertheless going to vote for Carter or Anderson. "I question his motives for wanting to be president," Vogel says of Kennedy. "In the back of my mind would be Chappaquiddick. He hasn't really stood up and said, 'This is me.'"

Organizers for Kennedy also confess that Chappaquiddick is an important issue for voters they talk to. One woman, who was trying to win the Jewish vote for Kennedy and didn't want to be identified publicly, said, "They say they're worried about his judgment and so forth, but the bottom line is Chappaquiddick."

### Subliminal ads.

There are different reasons why Chappaquiddick—and the complex of issues that surround it—have become so important in the Kennedy-Carter race.

The reason most adduced by the Kennedy campaign is the media's and the Carter campaign's focus on the issue. Immediately prior to the Iowa primary, the *Washington Star* and *Reader's Digest* published arti-

cles on Chappaquiddick that purported to disprove Kennedy's version of the event. The *New York Times* published a new "expose" the week prior to the Illinois primary.

The Carter campaign has subliminally focused on Chappaquiddick in its campaign commercials. The standard Carter radio-TV commercial suggests that despite Carter's weak record he is preferable to the untrustworthy womanizer, Kennedy:

*A man brings two things to a campaign—his record and himself. Who he is is frequently as important as what he has done. President Carter is a straightforward unassuming family man. People respect his integrity and trust his judgment, and they already know what kind of president he would be.*

The other reason often adduced by Kennedy organizers is the shroud that the Iranian crisis has cast over all substantive issues in the campaign. If popular concern were to shift back to Carter's handling of the economy, they argue, people would no longer find Chappaquiddick or Kennedy's behavior in college so significant.

Both these reasons are important, but the public response does reflect an abiding concern with character as a consideration in choosing presidents. This has been demonstrated repeatedly: in 1964, when Nelson Rockefeller's divorce hampered his presidential bid; in 1972, when Edmund Muskie and vice-presidential candidate Thomas Eagleton were both rejected by voters because of supposed character defects. In 1980 it has affected Governor Jerry Brown as well as Kennedy. (During one morning talk show, a New Hampshire voter asked Brown's sister, "There's one thing I'd like to know about your brother: is he queer or just a swinger?" In different forms, this question was asked repeatedly.)

Divorce, eccentricity, and instability have not mattered when it has come to re-electing these men to state houses or to the Senate, but have suddenly mattered when they have run for president. With Kennedy, Chappaquiddick didn't seem to matter until he actually began campaigning.

This American concern with character probably stems from the peculiar American political system, which limits a chief executive's ties to party or program. Character is therefore seen as an all-important determinant of a president's capabilities.

For his part, Kennedy only responded belatedly to public concern about his character. As Sidney Blumenthal reports in the *New Republic*, Kennedy was advised last fall by consultant David Garth to confront Chappaquiddick at the outset, but he rejected Garth's advice. Only as he began to fall behind in Iowa did Kennedy try to respond and then indirectly: he brought in Joan Kennedy to affirm his status as a family man.

During the New England primaries, Kennedy ran commercials in which Kennedy family members testified to his personal merits. In a televised address to New England voters, Kennedy also openly addressed Chappaquiddick.

Other times, he has still seemed determined to avoid the issue. On a March 9 appearance on *Face the Nation*, he responded to questions about public trust by simply reiterating his positions on the economy.

It may be there is nothing Kennedy could do to allay voters' fears. If so, it is a pity for Kennedy, whose qualifications for office are otherwise equal, if not superior, to the other presidential contenders; and it is an even greater pity for those Democrats who have sought in Kennedy a left-wing alternative to Carter's abdication to the oil companies and the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Debbie Goldman writes for the *Somerville (Mass.) Community News*.

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# Liberals fail to offer alternative

By David Moherg

CHICAGO

**A**FTER THE FIRST WAVE OF primaries in the South and the big vote in Illinois, the presidential line-up for November seems firm, barring precisely the sort of miracles and grand gaffes that the underdogs must hope for. It will be Jimmy Carter for the Democrats, Ronald Reagan for the Republicans and dismay for most voters.

Despite Carter's more than two-to-one margin in Illinois over Kennedy, polls indicate a significant drop in voter satisfaction with Carter's performance as president. Despite Reagan's strong win in Illinois—with 45 percent of the vote, compared to John Anderson's 37 percent and George Bush's 11 percent—an Illinois opinion poll shows Reagan less likely than Anderson, Bush or even reluctant Gerald Ford to beat Carter in the fall.

Clearly many people are going to feel disillusioned with the now likely choice. Even more ominously, the center of political debate will be shifted well to the right with the conservative sides of both parties fighting for the White House.

Yet the votes cannot simply be read as a conservative shift. Rather, there has been a collapse of the old Democratic liberalism as a semi-coherent political ideology and alliance, with nothing replacing it on the left. Reagan and Crane forcefully articulate a popular ideological position from the far right. Support for each of the other candidates is an unpredictable mix of personality, style, campaign image-making, past histories, incumbency, or scattered responses to various issues. The political catchword in describing the electorate now is "volatility," having pushed aside "momentum" for the moment as the center of journalistic attention.

Ted Kennedy, the choice of the left wing of the Democratic party according to a *New York Times* survey, in particular has failed to put together a persuasive alternative to Carter from the left. But even if he had, there is a good chance that the widespread voter uneasiness about his judgment or character would have continued to sink him. Even voters who favored his two prime campaign issues—price controls and gasoline rationing—will vote for Carter in Illinois, according to a 1978 *New York Times* poll. Throughout many of the working-class neighborhoods where Kennedy should have done well, there was serious concern about what one pro-Kennedy Democratic party activist summed up as "the girl problem."

Kennedy lost heavily to Carter in Illinois among Catholics (45 percent for Carter, 32 percent for Kennedy), among blacks (57 to 36), and among Jews (63 to 25), according to the CBS poll—all constituencies where he needed to win. He ran only slightly stronger in the city of Chicago itself—winning 33 percent of the vote—than in the suburbs (28 percent) and downstate (29 percent) for an overall tally of 30 percent to Carter's 65 percent. The same poll, furthermore, showed a surprising 41 percent of Democrats who said they would never vote for Kennedy.

## The Byrne backlash

Kennedy's prime backer in Illinois—Chicago mayor Jane Byrne—turned out to be a much bigger debit than asset. Not only was she unable to get her committee people and precinct captains to work hard for Kennedy (many handed out sample ballots without listing the party endorsement of Kennedy), but also Kennedy suffered from a strong anti-Byrne sentiment among voters.

Byrne wasn't even able to deliver on the separate delegate vote, and Kennedy

**"Volatility" is the new catchword as journalists strive to explain voter behavior in terms of single issues, images, and personalities.**

picked up only 14 delegates to Carter's 165—a reversal of Kennedy's moderately good showing in delegates compared to a weak popular vote.

Earlier in the campaign Byrne had insisted on running the campaign herself, pushing aside the Draft Kennedy enthusiasts who might have produced some active workers for Kennedy and antagonizing downstate Democrats. Although some trade unions, especially the Machinists and the Auto Workers, worked hard and independently for Kennedy, there was never a strong, well-financed, coordinated effort in Illinois.

Whenever Kennedy visited groups from whom he might have expected support, he seemed to find that they had forgotten any record of support for their positions Kennedy had offered. ("What has he ever done for us?" auto workers demanded of their staff.) He also found union members worried about gun control, Catholics opposed to abortion, blacks critical of his strong pro-Israel position that excludes the Palestinians, and liberals or leftists dogging him with challenges to his role in the omnibus criminal code revision.

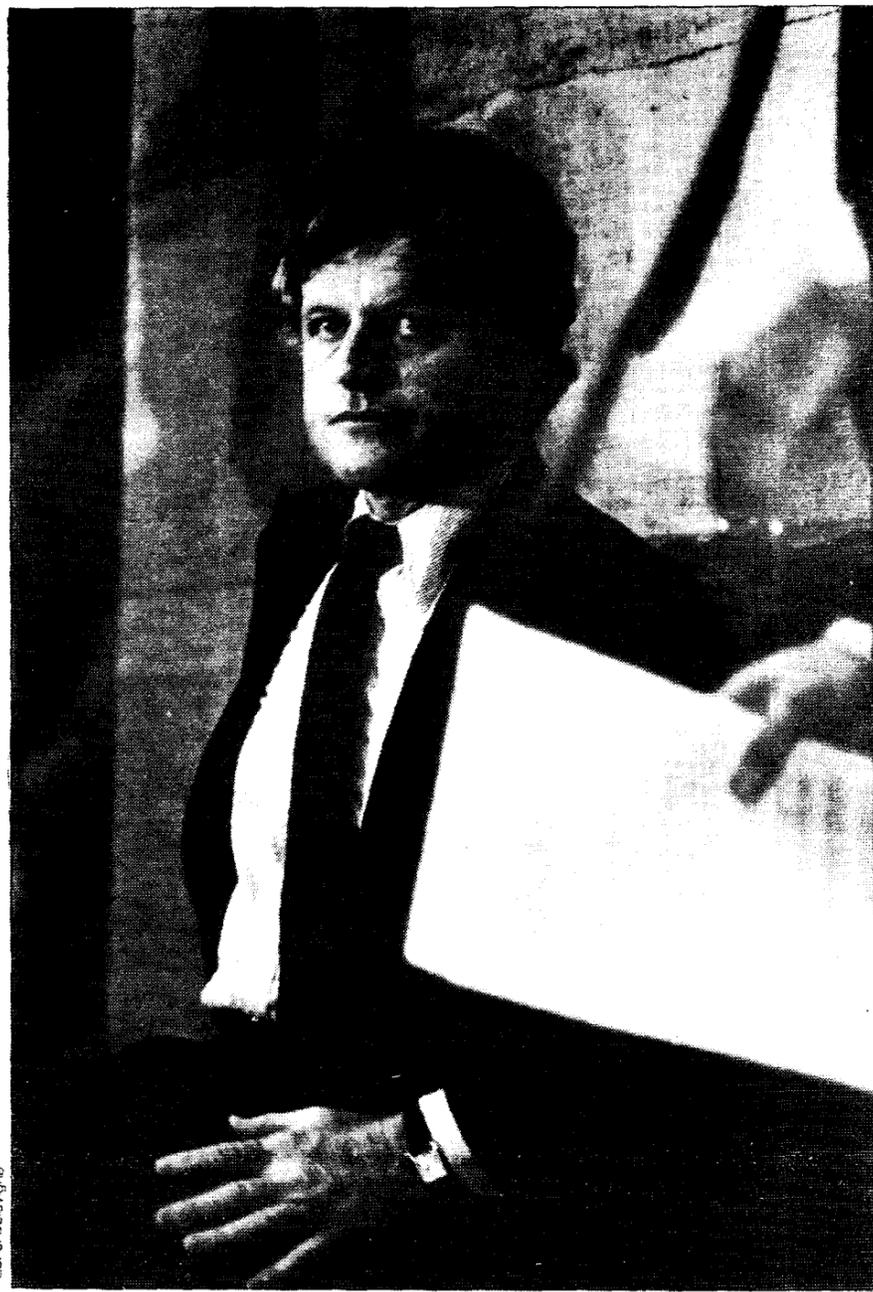
The Kennedy strategy from the beginning was flawed, and the "volatility" of voters brought that out. At first Kennedy campaigned as if he were simply ascending to the throne as rightful heir, emphasizing "leadership," minimizing any differences with Carter and offering no program. But the Iranian hostage-taking gave Carter a new aura as *de facto* leader and the emphasis on personal qualities simply drew out more of the Chappaquiddick concerns.

By the time Kennedy offered his alternative program, it was—as he later said of Carter's anti-inflation plan—"too little, too late." Voters who might have rallied behind Kennedy because he offered a way out of the current mess—a frustrating sense shared by many voters across any political spectrum that nothing works anymore—found no reason to support him.

"I just don't think Kennedy is saying anything more than Carter to make me vote for him," Joyce Zick, a 40-year-old housewife and community activist in Chicago's blue-collar Northwest side, said. "I wanted some good sound avenues to pursue for the economy—not just that the economy is a problem, but what are you going to do? Price controls sound good, but I think it's deeper than that. You've got to control at the top."

## Soft on corporations.

Although Kennedy has picked up his attack on the rich and the corporations slightly, he has failed to make abuse of corporate power the centerpiece of his campaign, even to the extent he has done in recent years as a senator. That would at least provide an alternative to the Republicans, who portray government as the villain, and would give his frequent advocacy of measures to help the poor and workers the air of a fighting crusade



Forty-one percent of Illinois Democrats told pollsters they would never vote for Kennedy.

instead of a humanitarian relief program.

"His campaign managers feared that the danger was that Kennedy would become a McGovern," one Kennedy supporter said of the early decision to distance Kennedy from his image as a left-leaning liberal, "when the danger was that he would become a Muskie."

Even a clearer, more forceful left-wing or populist campaign by Kennedy in Illinois would have run up against problems of voter cynicism, unwillingness to turn out an incumbent President (especially one benefiting from a foreign crisis) and the doubts about Kennedy's morality and judgment. Casey Kowalewski, 63, a striking International Harvester worker, showed all those reservations as he mused about his preferences after Kennedy addressed his UAW local.

"Right now I'm on the line. I could be swayed either way," Kowalewski said. "I don't believe anything the politicians say. They go to Washington and do what they want. But I do favor Carter a little bit, just because of the Iranian situation. Also, Chappaquiddick is still on my mind."

Carter's remote-control campaign has taken advantage of the situation—avoiding confrontation with Kennedy, sending out surrogate campaigners, emphasizing his family-man image and playing on crisis and his incumbency. Promise of money and implicit threats of retaliation helped to swing many Illinois politicians into the Carter camp. Then, just before the primary, Carter took advantage of his incumbency to announce his anti-inflation plan.

Although aimed in part at Kennedy, who has hammered away at inflation as his issue, Carter's speech may have been even more an anticipation of a Republican opponent down the line. It is possi-

ble that the decision to balance the budget—yet withhold announcement of the cuts to be made until after the New York and Illinois primaries—was made with the thought that Kennedy does not offer a sufficiently strong challenge from the left to worry about the political cost of the cuts. Meanwhile, every Republican has promised to balance the budget to fight inflation. Kennedy denounces as a myth the idea that a balanced budget would cut inflation significantly, but he, too, pledges to balance it in the near future, in part by ending certain corporate tax loopholes.

Despite Carter's big vote, there seems to be little enthusiasm for him. Supporters often offer some weak defense, such as, "He's trying awfully hard" or "He's doing the best he can under the circumstances," but there is stronger sentiment against the alternatives than for Carter.

## Liberals' last stand.

Considering the much-noted "volatility," the urgency of some "single-issue" crusades (especially opposition to abortion and gun control), and the weakening party identification, there is lots of speculation about the possibility that this election could result in a major political realignment in the U.S.

"The danger is that if we don't get the job done for Kennedy, we'll suffer for decades," Charlie Williams, Illinois legislative coordinator for the Machinists, said before the primary. "We could go through 20 years without a Democratic president. There's nobody in the wings. The long-term consequences could be disastrous. Liberals have been on the defensive for a long time. This could be the last stand."

The Republicans are trying several

Continued on page 18.