

Rep. Udall Seeking McCormack's Post As House Speaker

The text of Udall's letter is printed on Page 19.

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Dec. 26 —

Representative Morris K. Udall, Democrat of Arizona, today challenged 77-year-old John W. McCormack of Massachusetts for election as Speaker of the House in the 91st Congress.

In a six-page letter delivered to the offices of all Democratic House members this morning, Mr. Udall declared that "fresh leadership is vital to our party."

Mr. Udall, the 46-year-old brother of Interior Secretary Stewart L. Udall, asked his colleagues for their support when the House Democratic Caucus meets next Thursday to select its leadership for the new Congress, which convenes the next day.

He also asked his fellow Democrats for their suggestions, advice and criticisms and added: "It's lonely out here in orbit; say something!"

Odds Are Against Him

Friends of Mr. Udall conceded that the odds were against his unseating Mr. McCormack, who became Speaker in 1962 after the death of Sam Rayburn.

But the Udall candidacy brought into the open the widespread discontent over the Speaker's leadership among more liberal—and younger—House Democrats who contend that the party needs a more vigorous and articulate spokesman than Mr. McCormack.

Mr. McCormack, who has

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been in the House since 1928, has let it be known that he wants to remain Speaker for at least one more two-year term.

He was reported by his office to be on the way to Washington today and unavailable for comment. But one long-time friend of the Speaker said of Mr. Udall's challenge:

"He'll get blistered. The Speaker already has commitments from 200 members."

The Speaker is chosen by the majority party at a party caucus, and the nominee of the caucus is formally elected by a vote of the full House on the day a new Congress convenes. In the 91st Congress there will be 243 Democrats and 192 Republicans in the House.

1910 Revolt Is Cited

Capitol historians said today that no House Speaker had ever been deposed, although House members did revolt in 1910 against Speaker Joseph Cannon of Illinois and removed him as chairman of the House Rules Committee.

Revolts over the House minority leadership have been more common. In 1959, for example, Charles A. Halleck, Republican of Indiana was elected minority leader to replace Joseph W. Martin Jr. of Massachusetts and in 1965 Gerald R. Ford of Michigan defeated Mr. Halleck for the Republican minority leadership.

Mr. Udall appeared to be putting himself forward as a candidate around whom liberals and other dissident House Democrats could rally. He said, however, that the decision to run was "mine and mine alone."

"I am the candidate of no individual member or group of members," he said.

Mr. Udall, a tall man with close-cropped hair, has been a member of the Democratic Study Group, an organization of about 100 House liberals, since he was elected to the House in 1961 to succeed his older brother, who was appointed to the Cabinet.

Supporters of Mr. Udall, however, are hoping to attract House members outside the liberal study group although it was not immediately clear how widespread that support would be. Most House members have been away from Washington for Christmas.

Played Basketball

Mr. Udall, a lawyer and former professional basketball player with the Denver Nuggets, is regarded as a quiet but generally respected leader among the younger House Democrats.

"Mo doesn't shoot off his mouth unless he has something to say," one friend said.

In October 1967, Mr. Udall broke openly with the White House over its policy in Vietnam.

In his letter today, which was made public by other House Democrats, Mr. Udall expressed "my genuine respect and affection for Speaker McCormack."

"The party and the country are much in his debt for his contributions over the past 40 years," he said. "For me there is no joy in making this challenge to a fine man who has treated me with every courtesy. I do so only because I deeply believe there is an overriding need for new directions and new leadership."

Mr. Udall gave Mr. McCormack a copy of his letter last Tuesday, before it was delivered generally, Capitol Hill said.

Mr. Udall said that "conversations with a wide spectrum of members have convinced me that a majority of House Democrats privately and sincerely want a change." He pledged that if he received a majority vote at the caucus next Thursday, he would ask the caucus to reopen nominations so that other candidates could be considered in the final balloting.

Free Opportunity

"In this way, if a caucus majority wants changes, it will not only get it it will get a full and free opportunity to pick the very leader it wants," he said.

Mr. Udall noted that traditionally the votes in the party caucus had been taken by secret ballot. By pledging to open up the balloting to all candidates if the caucus indicated it wanted a change, he appeared to be suggesting a way for other candidates to come forward who otherwise would not directly challenge Mr. McCormack.

Mr. Udall said he could "enthusiastically support" other candidates for Speaker. High on any such list, he said, would be Carl Albert of Oklahoma, the House majority leader.

Mr. Albert is seeking re-election as the majority leader. He was unavailable for comment on Mr. Udall's letter.

Mr. Udall proposed, among other things, to make the House "a source of innovative programs to meet national problems," to use the Democratic Caucus more frequently to bring members closer to the leadership and to experiment with more efficient scheduling of House sessions so that members could more easily divide their time between Washington and their home districts.