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Bobby Makes Presidential Race

Look Easy

By ROY PARKER JR.

News and Observer Bureau
WASHINGTON — Robert F. Kennedy makes running for the presidency look duck soup easy.

In the process he is accomplishing something infinitely harder. He is strengthening the role of the United States Senate as an originator of ideas and advocate of policies.

Hardly a day passes that some member of Congress, or a White House staffer, doesn't read the morning paper and ask himself: "Why didn't I think of that?"

More likely than not, he will be talking about something that Kennedy, the junior senator from New York, has done.

Two more examples popped up this week.

The week opened with an announcement that an obscure Senate subcommittee headed by you-know-who would conduct public hearings on the use of hallucinogenic drugs.

Monday, the shy-looking senator went on the Senate floor with a speech large enough to choke the most hardened filibuster warhorse.

It was 65 pages long, and such a mouthful that Kennedy delivered it in two parts on succeeding days.

In it, he gave an expert look at conditions in Latin America and ended with a detailed pro-



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posal for new attention to the southern Hemisphere.

Most observers here believe that the United States must eventually pull in its global commitments and concentrate on helping the Latins cope with the revolution of rising expectations which is bubbling from the Rio Grande to Tierra del Fuego. The State Department's Latin American force is being revamped and restaffed for such an effort. Jack Hood Vaughan, director of the Peace Corps, is arguing in the highest circles of the Johnson administration for a massive new effort.

But Robert Kennedy's inch-thick speech beat everyone to the public punch. It will undoubtedly form the axis around which all future public discussion wheels.

The list is growing endlessly, of course. Depending on their point of view, almost everyone here believes Robert Kennedy is darkly plotting to grab the Democratic presidential nomination by 1972, or is stumbling toward it with all the aplomb of a lucky Irishman.

Yet, Kennedy hasn't really added anything to the encyclopedia of presidential politics.

He has, however, sped up the wheels of the U. S. Senate.

John F. Kennedy used the Senate as a base of operations for the presidency. He concentrated on politics—lining up delegates, showing himself to the banquets.

Some cynics say Robert Kennedy is doing the same thing. They can argue, with some logic, that all of his proposals are warmed over from somebody else's table.

For example, the real Senate foreign policy expert is not Kennedy, but William Fulbright, they say. Sen. Edmund Muskie of Maine is the top man on water pollution, not Mr. Kennedy. Abraham Ribicoff started the auto safety drive.

But even these experts give Kennedy full credit for giving their views maximum public exposure. They even welcome it. The prestige and talisman-like quality of his name guarantees news column space for his speeches and

drawing rooms and offices.

Further, Kennedy has nurtured new ideas on his own, gathered facts and proposals on once-unthinkable issues, and been willing to speak out on them.

The Senate is no longer a club. A tide of new blood has swept in to crack the grip of oldtimers.

In Robert Kennedy, whose eyes are always said to be on the mansion at the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue, the Senate has found the alchemist to bring this ferment for a new role to boil.

The process had been building through such men as Muskie, whose pioneer work makes him the real father of

the growing anti-pollution attack of the government.

The Fulbrights, Churchills, McGoverns, and Morses were no longer willing to accept executive leadership in foreign policy or intelligence activities. They launched the attack against Viet Nam policy and the CIA.

Oldtimer Hester Hill of Alabama was really the granddaddy of the government's health, medicare, and anti-poverty policies.

Yet it has remained for Robert Kennedy to dramatize the role of the Senate operative, the questing man with a will to search around for new ideas and then suggest them as policy.