

THE WIND AND THE LION: TED KENNEDY MANS UP TO MORTALITY

✖ The question has gone unasked out of respect, or murmured only quietly in back rooms: What about Teddy's health? Nobody wanted to be the one to say it in public. Nobody had to; once again Ted Kennedy is ahead of us. In a posting late Wednesday at the Boston Globe, comes news that Senator Edward M. Kennedy has authored a letter to Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick and the Massachusetts Congressional leaders requesting that provisions be made for his successor.

Literally generations of politically active American citizens have been motivated to study and participate in the political process by the men—and women—of the Kennedy family (I am one). Since the tragedies of the 60s however, the Old Lion of the family, and, indeed, the US Senate (and Democratic politics as a whole), has been Edward M. Kennedy. The storm and drang of the current health care fight? That has been his battle cry for decades. Barack Obama? Likely still a Senator if Ted Kennedy had endorsed Hillary Clinton instead. Name an important piece of social legislation passed in the last four plus decades and his fingerprints are on it.

So the question of "what if" about his health is an unpleasant, emotional and difficult one. But recent events have made the question undeniably germane. Senator Kennedy wasn't present for the Judiciary Committee consideration of Sonia Sotomayor's Supreme Court nomination; you knew he wanted to be there, but his absence was understandable. When he also was absent from the Senate floor for the historic confirmation vote for Sotomayor, the first Hispanic American elevated to the Court, you had a feeling he was seriously ill. A week later, when he could not attend the presentation when he was awarded the

Presidential Medal of Freedom, by Barack Obama, a man he likens to his brother John, you knew it was bad. And then he was absent from the funeral for his sister Eunice. Ted Kennedy always gave the eulogies for Kennedy family members; he always had to, and he was always there. Always. Until now.

From The Globe:

Senator Edward M. Kennedy, in a poignant acknowledgment of his mortality at a critical time in the national health care debate, has privately asked the governor and legislative leaders to change the succession law to guarantee that Massachusetts will not lack a Senate vote when his seat becomes vacant.

In a personal, sometimes wistful letter sent Tuesday to Governor Deval L. Patrick, Senate President Therese Murray, and House Speaker Robert A. DeLeo, Kennedy asks that Patrick be given authority to appoint someone to the seat temporarily before voters choose a new senator in a special election.

Although Kennedy, who is battling brain cancer, does not specifically mention his illness or the health care debate raging in Washington, the implication of his letter is clear: He is trying to make sure that the leading cause in his life, better health coverage for all, advances in the event of his death.

The extraordinary action Senator Kennedy requests is necessary because under a 2004 law passed in Massachusetts to prevent the potential that Mitt Romney would get to name a successor to John Kerry if Kerry had been elected President, voters would select Kennedy's successor in a special election to be held within five months of the vacancy. But the 2004

law makes no provisions for an interim replacement.

"I am now writing to you about an issue that concerns me deeply, the continuity of representation for Massachusetts, should a vacancy occur," Kennedy wrote.

To ensure that the special election is fair, the senator also urged that the governor obtain an "explicit personal commitment" from his appointee not to seek the office on a permanent basis.

Separately, a Kennedy family confidant, speaking on the condition of anonymity because the letter was private, said the senator's wife, Victoria Reggie Kennedy, is not interested in being a temporary appointee or running in a special election.

And, lastly, there was this:

"For almost 47 years, I have had the privilege of representing the people of Massachusetts in the United States Senate," Kennedy wrote in his letter.

Ted Kennedy is still a lion representing the interests of Massachusetts and the country, and still doing so selflessly and honorably by laying contingency plans for his own succession and drawing the sting from everybody else in addressing the subject head on. When the wind comes for the Lion he wants to insure we are ready. And that there is a vote for healthcare.