P.S. to the NEWS
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TEARS AND SMEARS, GAFFES AND LAUGHS

The election year of 1980 holds out great promise for eager candidates in whose heart hope springs eternal. But after the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November, like the lyrics of the old song "After the Ball is Over," "many a heart is aching, if you could read them all; many the hopes that have vanished, after the (election)."

Surveying the wreckage of candidates whose presidential aspirations were trampled on like the victims of the Cincinnati rock concert, it is interesting to see how many were destroyed by tears or smears, gaffes or laughs, and how many candidates' fatal wounds were self-inflicted.

George Romney, the Michigan Governor who sought the presidency in 1968, will always be remembered for his famous gaffe -- admitting that he had been "brainwashed." Nobody took his candidacy seriously after that.

Gerald Ford slit his own throat in 1976 when he said on television in front of God, the press, and the voters that the Communists do not control Eastern Europe. In that one gaffe, he lost the ethnic vote with which he could have won.

Edmund Muskie drowned his presidential hopes in his own tears in 1972 when he stood outside the offices of the Manchester Union Leader and wept in the snow in a cry-baby tantrum about personal criticism. Harry Truman used to say, "if you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen." Muskie couldn't, and did get out.

The man who reaped the benefit of Muskie's tears was George McGovern, who got the 1972 Democratic nomination. But McGovern let his own delegates use valuable prime-time television hours at the Convention promoting abortion and gay rights instead of their candidate.

Some presidential candidates have been defeated by smears, such as Barry Goldwater in 1964. Others survived. Grover Cleveland survived the campaign slogan which made

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his alleged illegitimate baby an issue: "Ma, Ma, where's my Pa? Sitting in the White House, Ha, ha, ha." Ulysses S. Grant survived the attacks on his drinking; concerned teetotalers were told that President Lincoln said, "Grant is the only general who wins; find out what brand he drinks so I can send it to my other generals."

But can a presidential candidate survive being laughed at? Will Ted Kennedy be the first presidential candidate to be ridiculed out of the race? Are jokes more devastating than smears, tears, or gaffes? Since Kennedy announced his decision to run, the latest parlor game has become the Kennedy joke -- and he is the butt of them all. Here are some samples.

"A lot of people would like to climb on Kennedy's bandwagon -- if they could be sure he isn't driving it." "Ted Kennedy has hired a new chauffeur -- Jacques Cousteau (the famous underwater expert)."

"Do you know what Wilbur Mills said to Ted Kennedy? At least my girl could swim." A variation is, "After Fanny Fox jumped in the tidal basin, Wilbur said to his chauffeur, 'Go call Ted Kennedy and say, I've got the girl in the water, what do I do now?'"

"Here's the latest good news-bad news joke. The bad news is that Jane Fonda is going to Iran to negotiate the release of 50 American hostages. The good news is that Ted Kennedy will drive her to the airport." Among the fans of Jerry Brown, who likes Fonda, the good news is that Jane is going to Iran, and the bad news is that Ted will drive her.

Presidents can survive jokes about their speech-delivery defects (Carter), or their walking defects (Ford), or their five o'clock shadow defects (Nixon), or their lack of sociability (Coolidge), or an escapade to darkest Africa with popular Linda Ronstadt sans marriage (Jerry Brown). But the Kennedy jokes all question his character, his integrity, and his fitness to lead the nation.

Jack Benny built a successful career by making himself the butt of all jokes. Kennedy's prospects might be brighter if he were running for top comedian rather than for President.

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