

Ted Kennedy Was Asked Why he Wanted to be President

In 1976 Jimmy Carter was elected president. When he ran for re-election he had a challenger in the primary, Ted Kennedy (that would not happen today—see later for that).

I had heard that Ted Kennedy was unable to say why he wanted to be president. I asked Google AI about this and got the following:

Yes, Ted Kennedy struggled badly and gave a rambling, inarticulate answer when asked why he wanted to be president.

https://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1918784_1958837_1918758-300.html),

<https://commonreader.wustl.edu/why-ted-kennedy-never-became-president-and-why-jimmy-carter-served-only-one-term/>

The Famous Interview

- *The Interviewer*: CBS News correspondent Roger Mudd.
- *The Date*: November 4, 1979, just before Kennedy officially launched his 1980 primary challenge against President Jimmy Carter.
- *The Question*: Mudd bluntly asked, *Why do you want to be President?*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e5TkhNWPspM&t=50>,
<https://www.quora.com/Why-was-Ted-Kennedy-never-a-popular-candidate-for-president-like-his-brothers>
https://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1918784_1958837_1918758-3,00.html

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The Response

- *The Stumble:* Kennedy stammered and hesitated, beginning with, *Well, I'm ... uhh ... were I to make the announcement ... to run ... the reasons that I would run is because I have a great belief in this country ...* <https://commonreader.wustl.edu/why-ted-kennedy-never-became-president-and-why-jimmy-carter-served-only-one-term/>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e5TkhNWPspM&t=50>
- *The Content:* He launched into a generalized list of America's natural resources, educated population, and political system, before awkwardly pivoting to how other industrial nations were outperforming the U.S. in productivity and inflation. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZX0RTribU2Q> <https://commonreader.wustl.edu/why-ted-kennedy-never-became-president-and-why-jimmy-carter-served-only-one-term/>
- *The Impact:* The messy, unfocused reply became legendary in political lore, with many observers and historians concluding that Kennedy lacked a clear personal rationale for seeking the office. <https://history-first.com/2019/02/04/the-question-ted-kennedy-the-pit-falls-of-running-for-president/> (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e5TkhNWPspM&t=50>)

Bill Comment: Ted Kennedy lost the nomination to Jimmy Carter. Carter then went on to lose the race for president to Ronald Reagan. Some thought that Kennedy challenging Carter weakened Carter which is why he lost to Reagan. Is that true? Personally I think the Iran Hostage crisis was a much bigger factor.

Since then, very few incumbents have had serious challengers, perhaps for fear they will be accused (rightly or wrongly) of leading to incumbent losing.

One possible counterexample: Pat Buchanan challenged George Bush for the nomination in 1992. He was running to get some issues on the table rather than to win, so I do not know if that counts as a serious challenger.