



Health Care Reform – Now What?!?

By now we're all somewhat familiar with the impact Republican Scott Brown's upset victory for the open United States Senate seat in Massachusetts has had on the previously steady march towards health care reform. Brown's election deprives Democrats of the supermajority voting advantage they had prior in the Senate with 60 votes and now gives Republicans the 41 needed to block legislation in the Senate chamber. Given this unforeseen turn of events, the question now becomes what is the Democrats health care reform strategy moving forward?

Several revised reform scenarios have emerged since Senator Brown's election two weeks ago, but most elected officials expected greater details to emerge from President Obama's State of the Union address and the subsequent party retreats last week. As it turns out, the President's speech provided very few details on what path the Administration prefers. However, by weeks end both Democrats and Republicans stated repeatedly that both parties must work together for any meaningful reform to pass.

Despite all of the rhetoric surrounding the issue, it is reasonable to expect the following options will be debated and discussed over the next several weeks:

- **Pass a scaled down version of reform that garners Republican support** - Democrats could work towards a more modest and incremental approach to health reform, an approach President Obama and a handful of moderate Republicans have publically voiced support for. One of the biggest challenges for this option would be getting more liberal Democrats to agree to a scaled down bill since many have invested a significant amount of time and energy into the process thus far. Another hurdle is that negotiating a revised bill will most likely use up a considerable amount of time and divert House and Senate Leaders' attention away from the working on the economy and job creation.
- **Use the "reconciliation" process to pass key pieces of the legislation via amendments to the Senate bill which requires 51 votes instead of 60** – This approach is appealing to House leaders and more liberal Democrats who want to see the current form of health care reform passed. Republicans and many moderate Democrats are opposed to this approach and refer to the election of Senator Brown as the American public's response in sharing their opposition.
- **The House passes the Senate bill as written** – This option would entail the House passing the Senate bill as written without the ability to make any changes. Although this option has garnered a considerable amount of attention in Washington, the chances of the House attempting this seems highly unlikely.
- **Do nothing** - This option also seems unlikely as President Obama has made health care reform one of the major issues of his presidency, so getting some type of bill passed will continue to be a priority. Also associated with this idea is to start over with the entire health care reform debate, something preferred by many Republicans that claim they were never part of the process to begin with.

Although Senator Brown's election greatly changed the dynamics of power in Washington, everyone still agrees that our country needs significant health care reform that addresses both access and affordability.