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All Eyes on Ahn \"Joseph\" Cao

Michael Sean Winters | Nov. 9, 2009 NCR Today

The significance of Ahn "Joseph" Cao's vote in favor of the House health care reform bill should not be understated. Especially because you can already imagine the nastiness that is about to be hurled his way from extremists within the GOP. He will, in short order, replace Dede Scozzafava, the woman pushed out of the race in NY-23, as the favorite target of those in the GOP who think that voting in favor of a bill supported by President Obama is akin to heresy. The two might consult with Cardinal Sean O'Malley to see what it feels like to be pilloried by people you thought were your friends and allies.

When House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer said Cao?s vote gave the leadership warrant to call the bill ?bi-partisan? the comment drew laughs at a press conference. But, Cao?s courage in standing up to his own party is a story that is tailor-made for Independent voters hungry for moderation and principled compromise in the halls of Congress. The more the media focuses on him and his reasons for voting for the bill, the more the GOP stance will appear extreme.

One of the reasons that Cao voted for the bill was its inclusion of the stringent restrictions on abortion funding contained in the Stupak Amendment. Already, some extreme pro-choice Democrats are calling for the Stupak Amendment to be stripped from the final bill. But, they run the risk of looking as extreme as the GOP naysayers. Like it or not, Cao?s vote has made him, along with Maine?s Senator Olympia Snowe, the most important Republicans in Washington.

The health care bill still has to navigate some treacherous legislative waters. But, I predict that the focus on Cao and his courageous vote will have a moderating influence on the discussions this week. Being in the center is usually the most uncomfortable place to be in Washington, but it is also the most decisive place to be. Cao, and the pro-life Democrats who voted for the Stupak Amendment and for the final bill were the key swing votes on Saturday night and they will remain the key swing votes going forward. Those of us who care about health care, or care about reducing the number of abortions, or both, need to support Cao and the pro-life Democrats.

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