

## All Eyes on Massachusetts

Michael Sean Winters | Jan. 18, 2010 NCR Today

The stakes in tomorrow's special election in Massachusetts could scarcely be higher. With Democrats holding the slimmest filibuster-proof majority possible, their control of the U.S. Senate could receive a sharp setback if Democrats lose the seat once held by Sen. Ted Kennedy. And, to be sure, the Democrat, Martha Coakley, deserves to lose. In the last week of the campaign, she has insulted Roman Catholics and Red Sox fans. In Massachusetts. Way to go Martha. She also committed the cardinal sin of electoral politics, appearing to take her victory for granted. Voters like to be asked for their vote and deeply resent anyone who doesn't.

One of the myths about tomorrow's race is that health care reform is dead if Coakley loses. Congressional Democrats are very, very eager to have health care behind them so they can begin addressing the economy. But, if they fail on health care, they and the President will be so crippled, they will not be able to make any significant progress on anything. So, if Coakley loses, and the Republicans pick up their 41st vote in the Senate, Harry Reid has an immediate negotiation with moderate GOP Sen. Olympia Snowe. The principal objection Snowe originally raised to the bill has been stripped from it: the public option. If she is not going to budge, the House will have to pass the Senate bill as is, without changing an iota. They won't like it, but they will like it better than doing nothing.

Which leads to the biggest unknown factor in tomorrow's primary: Turnout. SEIU has already announced it is spending boatloads of cash on a series of television ads but what the Democrats really need is for the unions to get their members to the polls. And, those members have a big motivation: If the Senate version of the health care bill were to pass, their health care benefits would be taxed. If Coakley wins, and the agreement worked out last week to shield union contracts from the tax on "Cadillac" insurance plans passes, those benefits will not be taxed.

No one knows what will happen tomorrow and the quality of reporting is often pathetic. Many sources have cited a Suffolk University poll that said only one percent of the electorate was undecided. That is evidence only of a screwy poll: On any given day, more than one percent of the electorate is hung over and undecided about whether they will go to work or not, or what their name is. A [report in the normally well-done Politico.com](#) [1] notes the absence of yard signs for Coakley compared to those for GOP contender, and former Cosmo magazine centerfold Scott Brown, but yard signs are pretty much a waste of money and if the Brown campaign is spending its resources there, rather than on making good voter lists for Tuesday, that bodes well for Coakley.

I have not been on the ground in Massachusetts so I will not venture a prediction except this one: No matter what the result in the Bay State, the consequences in Washington will be less than the hyper-ventilators think.

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