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THE BIG QUESTION, July 1: John Samples

The Big Question for Wednesday, July 1:

“Will Franken’s victory make a substantial impact on the Senate, or is 60 seats more of a symbolic threshold?”

See all responses here.

John Samples, Director of the [Center for Representative Government](#) at the [Cato Institute](#), said:

“Al Franken’s court-awarded victory in Minnesota will not completely end filibusters and gridlock in the Senate. His victory is much less significant than what many congressional observers are saying.

It has, however, affected how the Democratic leadership will need to distribute pork to bring controversial legislation to a vote.

If Franken had lost, Democratic leaders would have needed to attract at least one Republican vote to end a filibuster. Norm Coleman, Franken’s opponent, was not likely to be that vote. Coleman’s voting record in 2008 was much less liberal than the two Republicans from Maine. One of those two could have extracted benefits for Maine voters in exchange for agreeing to override a filibuster. Now their votes may matter less, and voters in Maine should expect less from Washington for the time being.

But that still assumes all Democrats vote to end a filibuster. Franken is likely to vote as his Minnesota colleague Amy Klobuchar did in 2008: she supported the liberal position 100 percent of the time in a vote survey by Americans for Democratic Action. Franken is thus unlikely to vote to sustain a filibuster, and therefore there are now fewer Democrats to keep filibusters alive. However, their votes are still crucial. To pick up the vote of moderate Nebraskan Ben Nelson, for instance, will now cost Majority Leader Harry Reid more than it did before Franken won. Ultimately, the greatest outcome of Franken’s win will be that voters in Maine will be harmed, while voters in Nebraska (or a similar state) will benefit. For the overall balance of power in Washington, though, Franken’s win is not the panacea for the Obama administration that you may have read about.”

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