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THE HEALTH-CARE BLOG

## Thursday, January 21, 2010

**Listen to America!** [Grace-Marie Turner]

Scott Brown listened to the American people. Washington didn't, and apparently still doesn't want to hear what they are saying.

White House advisers are trying to convince themselves and the media that the Massachusetts election wasn't about health reform, saying it wasn't an issue there because Massachusetts already has enacted reform.

But that's why it *is* such a big issue. Bay State voters are up close and personal with the kind of reform measures Washington has been devising. Their health costs continue to soar, they face mandates dictating what insurance they must have, and businesses and individuals are buried under onerous bureaucratic requirements and penalties. The Cato Institute has a new study out documenting this, validating findings from the Galen Institute's study last summer.

A Massachusetts resident made it very clear to a local TV interviewer before the election that his vote was going to be about Obamacare: "If I decide that the health plan they're working on in Washington is like what we have here, I'm voting for Brown," a voter said. He went on to criticize the tyrannies of the Massachusetts plan — the forced purchase of expensive insurance, the tax penalties, etc.

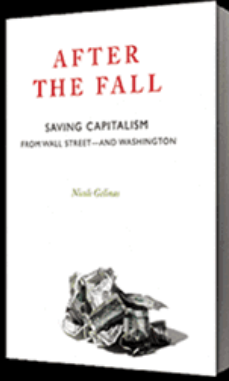
Scott Brown had the energy of the country behind him in Massachusetts because millions of people understood what was at stake. Make no mistake. His promise to vote against the bill was a key issue in his victory.

During the campaign, Brown repeatedly said: "One thing is clear: Voters do not want the trillion-dollar health-care bill that is being forced on the American people. This bill is not being debated openly and fairly. It will raise taxes, hurt Medicare, destroy jobs, and run our nation deeper into debt. It is not in the interest of our state or country — we can do better."

Rasmussen found that 52 percent of Bay State voters who were surveyed as the polls closed said they opposed federal health-reform measures, and 42 percent said they cast their ballot to help stop President Obama from passing his top domestic initiative.

Tony Fabrizio of Fabrizio, McLaughlin & Associates, a Republican firm, found similar sentiment in its exit poll of 800 voters. "A plurality of voters said their vote was to stop the president's health-care plan — more than those saying it was a vote against his policies in

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general," Fabrizio wrote in a memo that accompanied his exit polling.

Millions of people rightly have become frightened about the sweeping health-overhaul legislation that Congress was within a breath of passing. The more people learned about the legislation, the less they supported it. Their views would not change if the legislation were to pass, as Pelosi and Obama say. Opposition would instead become hardened.

While the leadership in Congress still is talking about pushing forward, they will have a very, very difficult time getting the votes in their own caucus to prevail. Rank and file members are running scared, realizing there is not a safe seat in the country.

The American people have been saying every way they can for a year that they are frightened about what President Obama's health overhaul — and his entire liberal agenda — would do to America, to our prosperity, and to our freedom.

In his quest for the Massachusetts Senate seat, Brown finally gave Americans a way to coalesce behind a candidate who could do something, promising to be the 41st vote against Obamacare — the man who could stand up against the machine.

But the astonishing thing is Democratic leaders still aren't listening. In yet another rebuff of representative democracy, Speaker Nancy Pelosi said yesterday "We will move forward," and she met all afternoon with colleagues trying to convince them to swallow the despised and pork-laden Senate bill.

The only path to passage of reform legislation now is for the president and the leaders in Congress to work with members from both sides of the aisle to come up with a smaller, more reasonable bill.

The American people have made it clear they want [health insurance](#) that is reliable and more affordable and that does not exclude people with pre-existing conditions. Congress could start by helping states to create more functional high-risk pools, by giving people more choices of how and where they purchase health insurance, and by assuring people that if they have coverage, they can keep it. They need to create a path toward ownership of health insurance and genuine competition among insurers. And now that people know how much wasteful spending there is in Medicare and Medicaid, they want that fixed.

There is a world of policy complexity behind these initiatives, but Congress must start by respecting that people value private health insurance, don't want huge disruptions and losses of freedom or massive new taxes and entitlement costs. Then a new conversation can begin.

The most important thing is to get the incentives right so that power and control over health-care decisions rests with doctors and patients and not politicians and bureaucrats.

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