

Web Site Info

Health Care Reform

Jan. 19

Massachusetts Elects a New Senator:

Immediate Changes Under Way on Health Care Reform Legislative Strategy

In a January 19 Massachusetts special election, the Republican candidate, Scott Brown, won by a close vote to replace the Senate seat left vacant by the deceased Democratic Senator Teddy Kennedy. Democratic Congressional leaders and the White House immediately began deliberating on next steps for health care reform legislation. Republican candidate Scott Brown defeated Democratic candidate Martha Coakley, delivering a stinging loss to Democrats who until then held a supermajority in the Senate. Plans to send a revised version of the health care bill for further votes have come to a screeching halt, as it is not expected that after Brown is seated, Democrats would be able to avoid a filibuster in the Senate.

Congressional leaders and the White House are working on back-up plans including one plan that would involve the House passing the Senate version of the bill, avoiding the need to send the comprehensive legislation back to the upper chamber. House lawmakers who object to a number of the provisions in the Senate's current version could alter the larger bill through separate legislation that the Senate would vote on using the reconciliation process, which would require only a simple majority.

It appears that a Republican win in the liberal state of Massachusetts has rattled some House Democrats enough for them to express doubts about supporting the Senate bill, with or without a reconciliation package. The press is reporting that another back up plan would consist of a pared down package to be passed and sent to the President's desk. But this bill would still need to survive votes in both chambers. It is unclear whether

even a stripped-down bill could get approved by Congress quickly. Continue to log on to this special section on our Web site for information on new developments in health reform.