

By Rep. Steve King

When the people of Massachusetts chose to send Scott Brown to Washington, D.C., as their next senator on Jan. 19, the decision was significant on many levels.

A member of the Kennedy family had occupied the Senate seat since 1953. Massachusetts had not elected a Republican senator since 1972. In the 2008 presidential election, President Obama won Massachusetts by 26 percent.

That a Republican senator emerged from the most unlikely quarter of the country is remarkable. But perhaps more remarkable is the message the Massachusetts election sent about proposed health care reform legislation.

According to a Rasmussen Reports election night poll, 47 percent of voters in Massachusetts favor health care legislation pushed by President Obama and Democrats while 51 percent oppose it. That a majority of voters in one of the most traditionally liberal states in America oppose the current health care reform proposal speaks volumes about its unpopularity.

More and more Americans are frustrated with the entire health care reform process. After Americans expressed their opposition to a government-run plan for months at town hall meetings and tea parties, Speaker Pelosi bypassed House committees in November and muscled a bloated bill through the House with just enough votes to pass.

Next, at President's Obama insistence, Senate leaders used strong-arm tactics to pass a completely partisan health care bill on Christmas Eve. This Senate legislation is the product of backroom deals and includes numerous special

interest payoffs like the “Cornhusker kickback.” In exchange for Nebraska Sen. Ben Nelson’s vote, Senate leaders wrote language into the bill ensuring that the federal government would pay for expanded Medicaid coverage only in Nebraska.

Until Brown’s election last week, President Obama, Speaker Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid spent 2010 crafting a final health care bill out of the public’s eye. Despite a January 2008 promise by candidate Obama not to negotiate health care legislation “behind closed doors” and a commitment to broadcast negotiations on C-SPAN, when push came to shove, C-SPAN’s request to broadcast these negotiations was rebuffed and backroom deals continued.

Bypassing a joint House-Senate conference committee and shutting C-SPAN cameras out of health care negotiations allowed the Obama-Pelosi-Reid troika the opportunity to draft a completely new bill that would not be subject to congressional committees or amendments. But aspirations of quickly ramming this new bill through the House and Senate were dashed by Brown’s election.

As Washington liberals scramble to pass some aspect of their health care plan, the right thing to do is to reform health care reform. The American people are unhappy with the current process and even more dissatisfied with its result.

Meetings closed to the public, deal making and a lack of transparency have come to define health reform. This may be the norm in a Chicago-style gangster government, but it will not be tolerated by constitutional conservatives.

Thomas Jefferson once said, “Large initiatives should not be advanced on slender majorities.” Americans have a right to know what is going on so they can make their voices heard.

Real health care solutions supported by Republicans and some Democrats in

Congress exist, such as lawsuit abuse reform. When Democrats are ready to turn the pockets of the trial lawyers inside out, rather than those of the bankers, we will know they got the message. Going forward, health care reform should focus on solutions like this and follow a transparent process open to the American public.