

The Other Winner on Tuesday

Michael Sean Winters | Jan. 21, 2010 NCR Today

There were two winners in the special election in Massachusetts this week. One of them, Senator-elect Scott Brown, arrived in Washington today and will soon take his seat in the U.S. Senate. The other winner comes from just up I-95 from Brown's hometown of Wrentham, Massachusetts: Maine Senator Olympia Snowe.

Last summer, Snowe was the last Republican to leave the negotiating table when the Senate Finance Committee was drafting its bill. She had several concerns about the legislation, but chief among them was the public option, which is now no longer an option in any scenario. It was always a mistake to move forward without Snowe, and among all of Majority Leader Harry Reid's mistakes, this was the greatest. Not only would Snowe have been insurance against the whimsies of Joe Lieberman and the principles of Ben Nelson, Snowe always brings something to the table that the others do not: the "bi-partisan" label.

This morning [E.J. Dionne wrote](#) [1] about the often conflicting goals of President Obama, that he wants to do big things and that he wants to break the partisanship in Washington. Now, whether he wants to or not, the President needs Snowe and/or her Maine colleague Senator Susan Collins to move any legislation. (It will be very curious to see if the new Senator from Massachusetts reaches out to his colleagues from Maine or those from Mississippi!) This may mean that he must scale back his goals, but it is not impossible to think that much can be accomplished. Snowe and Collins are reasonable. If he can bring them on board key issues like health care, immigration reform and climate change legislation, he can still be the kind of transformational leader he aspires to be. The surprise in the Massachusetts would, then, create a third winner: A successful Obama administration.

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[1] <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/01/20/AR2010012003894.html>