

## Massachusetts Election Has Impacts for Health Care, Climate Change

By Tina Henderson

Massachusetts State Sen. Scott Brown's upset victory over state Atty. Gen. Martha Coakley Jan. 19 for the late Ted Kennedy's U.S. Senate seat will likely derail both health care reform and climate change legislation, Jordan Dux, Nebraska Farm Bureau national affairs coordinator, said Jan. 20. The Republican Party's gain of a 41<sup>st</sup> Senate seat changes everything, he said, by ending the Democrats' 60-seat super majority.

"Sen. Brown's victory in Massachusetts has sent reverberations throughout Washington, leading many Democratic leaders to rethink their agendas on health care reform and climate change. In many ways, this election has come to symbolize how many Nebraskans and Americans view what is happening in Washington. Many are frankly fearful of the direction and speed at which decisions are being made on Capitol Hill," Dux said.

Massachusetts traditionally has been one of the country's more liberal states. It appears Brown rode a wave of voter anger to defeat Democrat Coakley who had been considered a surefire winner until just prior to the election. Her loss could signal political problems for many this fall when House, Senate and gubernatorial candidates are on the ballot nationwide, Dux said.

### Ag on the Agenda?

"We hope what happened in Massachusetts will help Congress listen to the voices of the American people and it will put farmers' and ranchers' concerns back on the agenda.

"Congress left Washington at the end of last year with many unsettled issues, including estate taxes, the biodiesel tax credit and numerous international free trade agreements. It's our hope that Congress will address these issues sooner rather than later," Dux said.

Congress had planned to take up health care reform in January and possibly pass a bill as soon as the beginning of February. Differences in the House and Senate versions slowed the process as Senate and House Democrats tried to achieve a compromise bill.

### Not the Way To Go

"Farm Bureau has said that health care reform is needed. However, legislation with individual and employer mandates that would also increase health insurance premiums for farmers and ranchers was simply not the direction it needed to go," Dux said.

Even though Brown's main campaign issue was health care reform, his victory also will have an impact on Congress' ability to pass Climate Change legislation this spring.

"Right now the entire Congressional agenda is up in the air. We will have to wait to see how all of this shakes out in the coming weeks," Dux said.