



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on January 20, 2010

## Brown "Croaks" Coakley, Dems in Mass

The good news for the White House Wednesday morning was that Massachusetts is not Haiti. That unfortunate Caribbean nation suffered another earthquake early Wednesday morning, measuring 6.1 on the Richter scale. But there is no political Richter scale to measure the tremors and shock that traveled Tuesday night from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to the power centers of Washington, D.C. when it became clear that Massachusetts Attorney General Martha Coakley, the Democrats' designated heir to the Senate seat held since the last days of the Truman administration by the Kennedy dynasty of Massachusetts, had lost the seat to, of all people a Republican!



The victory by attorney and State Sen. Scott Brown for the seat held for more than 46 and a half years by the late Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, the "Last Lion" of New Deal, Great Society liberalism, has already been dubbed "the Scott heard 'round the world." Perhaps the unfortunate inhabitants of Haiti had neither the time nor inclination to pay it much attention, but in the United States and much of the world, the election is a significant harbinger of what may be the rough and tumble politics of 2010.

But Brown, the candidate who pulled off this dramatic upset, is almost an afterthought. Yes, he was a personable and attractive, telegenic candidate with an equally attractive family. And he campaigned well, cleverly comparing his ideas about taxation and economic recovery favorably with those of the late President John F. Kennedy, who first won that very same Senate seat, defeating Republican Henry Cabot Lodge in 1952. Brown also carefully drew a clear distinction between the Senate seat and the Kennedy estate, saying it was not the Kennedys' seat, it was the seat belonging to the people of Massachusetts. And if he made any gaffes during the short but intense campaign, they were fewer in number and far less serious than those committed by his more experienced and better-known opponent.

The good news for voters is that it is possible to insult the intelligence of voters sufficiently that even in a virtual one-party state, the voters will notice and vote against the candidate of their own party. It may not be easy, but Coakley proved if you work at it hard enough, it can be done. She did it first of all by suggesting she really did not want to, and thought she did not need to, work very hard at winning the seat she apparently thought she had won when she defeated a couple of relative unknowns in the Democratic primary. The fact that she was running against another comparative unknown on the Republican ticket no doubt encouraged and emboldened her complacency.

So she did too little and said too much. Even the liberal, Kennedy-friendly *Boston Globe* noted the passive, laid back nature of the Coakley campaign, pointing out, for example, that on the day after a tough TV debate with Brown, Coakley had no campaign appearances scheduled. The candidate seemed to think it unreasonable for people to expect her to brave the snow and cold to try to save the Senate



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seat for the Democrats and the keepers of the Kennedy flame. To the charge that she was being too passive, she issued the famous and oft-quoted retort: "As opposed to standing outside Fenway Park? In the cold? Shaking hands?" That, of course, is exactly what Brown was seen doing after the Boston Bruins played an outdoor hockey game at the fabled baseball shrine.

As if that were not enough, Coakley, in the heart of Red Sox nation, called Chuck Shilling, the hero of the first World Series victory for the Red Sox in 86 years, "a Yankees fan." And in one of the most heavily Catholic states in America, Attorney General Coakley, objecting to the "conscience clause" legislation championed by Brown, allowing hospital personnel to refuse to dispense the "morning after" abortion pill in emergency situations, suggested that perhaps devout Catholics and other religious people with scruples about abortion should not work in emergency rooms. Perhaps Coakley was on to something. Perhaps, from her vantage point, they shouldn't vote, either.

There are several ways to spin this special election, the first victory by a Republican in a U.S. Senate race in Massachusetts since 1972. Between them, the Democrats and Republicans covered all, or nearly all, of them. Republicans had a field day over the fact that former President Bill Clinton and President Barack Obama, trying to pull out a win for Coakley on the eve of the anniversary of his own inauguration, made dramatic, well-publicized appearances for their candidate in the Bay State and failed to move the voters. The *Boston Globe* headlined the outcome as a "Big Win for Brown." In neighboring New Hampshire, the statewide daily chose to emphasize the broader, national implications: "GOP upsets Obama in Mass." was the headline in the *New Hampshire Union Leader*.

There was also the "All politics is local" spin attempted by those who tried to explain the upset by saying it was driven more by local issues and controversies than by voters' reactions to Coakley, Obama, or the national healthcare legislation being pushed by the Democrats in Washington. The more candid, plainspoken members of the media were not buying it. "This wasn't about a trash ordinance in Billerica!" roared Peter St. James Wednesday morning on WTPL-FM in Concord, NH.

What this could mean for the Democrats' healthcare legislation is not yet clear. Brown gives the Republicans the necessary 41st vote to sustain a filibuster and force Senate Democrats to deal with the Republicans and the concerns they say they have been hearing from their constituents. It is possible, of course, that the Democrats may attract the votes of one or more of the moderate-to-liberal Republicans. The Maine duo of Susan Collins and Olympia Snowe are obvious possibilities. But it is just as likely, and given the momentum now perhaps more likely, that the Republicans can attract some Blue Dog Democrats to oppose the legislation. Surely, the concerns represented by the Stupak amendment in the House bill, forbidding the use of federal funds for coverage of abortion, cannot be easily swept aside, even if some Democrats may believe, with Coakley, that people with deep religious beliefs should not work in hospital emergency rooms.

Indeed, coming as it did on the heels of Republican victories last November in the gubernatorial races in Virginia and New Jersey, the Massachusetts election may be a further indication of a trend that could be working against the Democrats nationally throughout the mid-term elections of 2010. The parallels with the mid-term elections of 1994 are striking: a President, in his second year, pushing a national healthcare plan that is seen as overreaching and threatening existing health insurance coverage, and a backlash easily attributed to "angry white voters."

Former Mass. Governor Mitt Romney, the candidate who in the 1994 Republican "Tsunami" gave Edward M. Kennedy the only close race of his long Senate career, was at the Brown victory celebration Tuesday night and had the honor of introducing the winning candidate. Surely Romney, who ran



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unsuccessfully for the GOP nomination for President in 2008 and is expected to compete for it again in 2012, was counting his blessings that finally something good for the Republicans had come out of the state of Massachusetts.

And somewhere in the shadows of power, perhaps watching the returns with his old friend and political mentor Henry Kissinger, former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, a darling of the one-world devotees on the Council on Foreign Relations and the author of the 1994 Republicans' "Contact with America," was no doubt plotting to get back into the middle of the action for the 2010 congressional elections and to position himself to pursue his party's presidential nomination in 2012.

Photo of Scott Brown: AP Images



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