



## No. 41

As a first-term senator, Scott Brown is likely to burnish his credentials as an independent **BY SHAWN ZELLER**

**WITH HIS ELECTION** win in January, Scott Brown disappointed a lot of Democrats. But aside from his opponent, Attorney General Martha Coakley, no one lost more in that election than Ben Nelson. A Nebraska Democrat, Nelson was considered the Democrats' 60th vote before Brown knocked him down a peg. After Brown's upset victory, Nelson is just No. 59, and in the Senate, where filibuster rules require 60 votes to get almost anything done, that's a big difference.

As probably the most conservative Democrat in the chamber—and the last holdout when the Senate voted in December to approve a major health care overhaul—Nelson milked his vote for all it was worth, extorting his Democratic colleagues into agreeing to tap the federal treasury to cover any increase in Nebraska's Medicaid costs that his state might incur as a result of the Senate bill becoming law.

Now Brown is the one with special status—the 41st vote—and the ability to wield more influence than a typical freshman senator. And his leverage could pay off for Massachusetts in the months to come. As Nelson's experience in the health care debate shows, “when you are a crucial vote, you can get a lot of goodies,” says Brian Schaffner, a political science professor at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

In February, Brown defied his own party leadership to help the Democrats pass a tax credit for employers who hire new workers. But he retained his star-quality cachet with Republicans, who are just as readily offering favors to keep him on their side.

In March, Mitch McConnell, the Senate minority leader from Kentucky, said Brown would have seats on the Senate Armed Services Committee, with its control over billions in Pentagon spend-

ing, and on the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs panel, another prestigious assignment not typically handed to the lowest ranking member of the minority party. Republican Senate leaders, who make the committee assignments, said they hoped the assignments would give Brown a leg up as he begins to build a case for reelection in 2012.

Whether Brown can maintain the boy-wonder aura beyond an initial honeymoon is another question altogether. That's because for every time Brown crosses the aisle to win a victory for Massachusetts, he figures to lose some chits with his fellow Republicans, who've adopted a strategy of stonewalling Obama in the hopes of parlaying the ensuing gridlock in Washington to a big GOP victory in November. And if more Republicans are elected this November, as is widely expected, Brown won't be the Republicans' 41st vote anymore, or the Democrats' 60th either.

But for the moment, he may use his enviable status to reap the benefits that come with being a centrist. “I'm an independent voter and thinker. I always have been,” he said at a press conference upon arriving in Washington this winter. And though he quickly cast his first vote as Senate GOP hardliners wanted him to—helping to sink a union-backed nominee to the National Labor Relations Board—he said he wanted to make it clear that he was under no undue pressure from his party's Senate leaders.

**BROWN JOINS A** team from the Bay State made up of 10 House Democrats and five-term Democratic Sen. John Kerry, and he told *CommonWealth* that he's eager to make the case that having bipartisanship in the delegation is better than not. He



Senators Kerry and Brown could become allies on environmental issues.

says that “single-party political dominance, both on Beacon Hill and [in] Washington, DC, too often leads to bad government and poor decisions” and that his brand of independent Republicanism will help break the “partisan gridlock in Washington.”

The new senator claims his vision is one of collegial give-and-take. But experts say he’s more likely to reap rewards for the Bay State by playing hardball and then cutting deals. “Anytime you are the potential 60th vote, you have outsized power in the Senate,” says Matt Dallek, a former aide to then-House Democratic Leader Richard Gephardt of Missouri who’s now a visiting scholar at the Bipartisan Policy Center, a think tank in Washington that encourages the parties to work together.

However the deals are made, Brown will have to work with the Democrats to get things done. But to maximize his power, and his utility to the voters back home, Brown will have to do it while also maintaining his leverage with Senate GOP leaders. If he can do both, he may find he has a long Senate career ahead of him. But it’s not going to be easy, as the dismal, recent history of GOP moderates—Brown excepted—would indicate. Even Republicans wishing Brown the best say it would be just as easy for him to become an unexceptionable back-bencher, especially considering that he replaced Sen. Edward Kennedy, almost universally acknowledged as one of the most

effective senators of all time. With all the uproar after Brown’s victory over Coakley, including questions about his presidential ambitions, a reality check is in order. “A senator is almost always more powerful and more effective if he is in the majority,” says Frank Micciche, who headed former GOP Gov. Mitt Romney’s Washington office and is now a senior advisor at the law firm McKenna Long & Aldridge.

But Micciche also believes that the unique circumstances that brought Brown to power could give him the cachet necessary “to turn that on its head” and succeed both in serving Massachusetts well and setting himself up for reelection.

If Brown can hang on until Republicans reclaim the majority, his power will expand exponentially. Most political prognosticators say there is little chance the Republicans will gain control of the Senate in 2010, but it is likely that starting next year the bloc of GOP moderates will begin to expand after suffering severe contractions in the 2006 and 2008 elections. Moderate Republicans like Mike Castle of Delaware and Mark Kirk of Illinois are running strong for Senate seats this November. Combine them with Brown and Maine’s two moderate Republican senators, Olympia Snowe and Susan Collins, and you have a powerful coalition. “That bloc could be crucial to a lot of deals,” says Dallek.

A bigger bloc of GOP centrists also carries risks for Brown. He could easily fall into the trap that has befallen fellow Republican moderates in the past, from former Sen. Lincoln Chafee of Rhode Island to ex-Reps. Chris Shays of Connecticut and Charlie Bass of New Hampshire. All were unloved by their own leadership and undercut

## Brown aims to break the ‘partisan gridlock.’

by criticism from their right flank before ultimately being unseated by Democrats. The threat of a conservative primary challenge last year actually pushed longtime GOP Sen. Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania to become a Democrat.

**BROWN IS CLEARLY** preparing for the future, surrounding himself with former aides to Romney—who perfected the balancing act between conservatism and bipartisan moderation that a Massachusetts Republican must perform. Among Brown’s first hires were chief of staff Steven Schrage, who advised Romney’s 2008 presidential campaign, and communications director Gail Gitcho, who was a campaign spokeswoman for Romney.

According to Micciche, another Romney administration veteran, Brown's window to work with the other party is now. "Some of the ones who appear the toughest partisans, like Barney Frank, also seem to get the need to cross party lines at times. They won't do him any favors. But Brown is in a position now where you wouldn't want to pick a fight with him for the sake of picking a fight. He's got political capital."

If Brown were to cross the aisle to work with Frank, who chairs the House Financial Services Committee, on new banking regulations, he might make Frank amenable to helping him out down the road. Likewise, if Brown were to work with Kerry on climate change legislation—where Kerry is leading an effort to forge a bipartisan solution—Brown might make a fast friend of his senior colleague, who's eager to bolster his legacy by tackling global warming. Notably, Brown, on Beacon Hill, was more likely to work with Democratic colleagues on environmental and energy issues than on any other area, according to an analysis of his votes conducted by the *Washington Post*.

Although the last two Republicans to serve Massachusetts in Congress—Danvers's Peter Torkildsen and Shrewsbury's Peter Blute—were defeated in the 1996 elections,

there is some history of productive bipartisanship there, says Christian Zur, who was Torkildsen's deputy chief of staff during his two House terms.

"The dean at the time was Joe Moakley, who was very kind to my former boss. They could work together," says Zur. "Ted Kennedy would personally call my boss when he needed things done in the House." Zur credits that cooperation with helping to secure funding for the Big Dig after Republicans, deeply skeptical of the project, seized the majority in both chambers in 1994.

For such cooperation to resurface, one of the delegation's top Democrats will have to reach across the aisle. "Someone has to be truly magnanimous like Kennedy was, or totally unthreatened like Moakley," says Zur.

While it's still too early to tell if such relationships will emerge, at least for now Brown's new Democratic colleagues are holding their fire. "On the great issues of the day, you can expect differences, but what to watch is the nitty-gritty stuff" that's important to the Bay State, says Michael Capuano, the Somerville Democrat who lost his bid to challenge Brown to Coakley in the Democratic primary last year. "It's about building personal relationships across the aisle. He has to make those choices and decide what kind of senator he wants to be." **CW**

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**1846** First public demonstration of ether use during surgery

—Massachusetts General Hospital

**1896** First use of X-ray image for diagnosis in the U.S.

—Massachusetts General Hospital

**1929** First use of iron lung to save polio victim

—Brigham and Women's Hospital

**1954** First successful human organ transplant

—Brigham and Women's Hospital

**1962** First successful surgical reattachment of severed limb

—Massachusetts General Hospital

**1984** First heart transplant performed in New England

—Brigham and Women's Hospital

**1993** Discovery of genes responsible for Huntington's disease and inherited ALS

—Massachusetts General Hospital



**1998** First successful transplant of kidney with bone marrow, removing long-term need for anti-rejection drugs

—Massachusetts General Hospital

**2003** Development of CRP test to predict risk of heart attack and stroke

—Brigham and Women's Hospital

**2004** First quintuple lung transplant performed in the U.S.

—Brigham and Women's Hospital

**2008** Development of microchip device to detect rare, minute cancerous tumor cells in bloodstream of cancer patients

—Massachusetts General Hospital

**2009** Partial face transplant, only the second ever in U.S.

—Brigham and Women's Hospital



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