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Democrats Won't Rush to Pass Senate Bill

By [CARL HULSE](#)

WASHINGTON — [Scott Brown](#)'s decisive Senate victory in Massachusetts imperiled the fate of the Democratic health care overhaul in Tuesday as House Democrats indicated they would not quickly approve a Senate-passed health care measure and send it to [President Obama](#).

After a meeting of House Democratic leaders even as Mr. Brown's win was being declared, top lawmakers said they were weighing their options but the prospect of finishing off the debate with House passage of the Senate plan appeared to significantly diminish.

Noting that the election in Massachusetts turned on a variety of different factors like the economy and local issues, Representative Chris Van Hollen, Democrat of Maryland and a top party campaign strategist, said resistance to the emerging health legislation also figured in the anti-Democratic equation.

"Health care was also part of the debate, and the people of Massachusetts were right to be upset about provisions in the Senate bill like the Nebraska purchase and other special deals," Mr. Van Hollen said, referring to elements included in the bill to win the votes of Democratic senators and round up 60 votes.

The comment was a clear indication that Democrats were recalibrating their approach on health care, leaving them a diminishing and politically difficult set of choices.

House approval of the Senate plan was favored by some lawmakers and strategists as a way to quickly resolve the issue and deliver the president a bill on a signature domestic achievement with just one final House vote. Remaining problems could be worked out with a subsequent piece of legislation.

But many House Democrats expressed deep reservations about the Senate bill, and those complaints, combined with the message sent by the Massachusetts electorate, apparently were sufficient to leave Speaker [Nancy Pelosi](#) of California and her lieutenants reluctant by Tuesday night about moving in that direction.

Democrats now face decisions on whether to give up on the health care fight — an approach few lawmakers appear willing to entertain — or perhaps pull together a scaled-back measure and use special procedural rules that would eliminate the need for 60 votes in the Senate. But it is not clear how many of the key provisions of the legislation could be passed under such a procedure.

At the same time, Mr. Brown appeared likely to claim his seat quickly, with Democrats saying their new Republican colleague would be sworn in as soon as he could present documents certifying his election.

"The people of Massachusetts have spoken," said Senator [Harry Reid](#), Democrat of Nevada and the majority leader.

The timing of Mr. Brown's swearing-in has been a point of contention. Republicans and conservative activists have raised the possibility that Democrats might stall and use the delay to force through a final health care bill while Senator [Paul G. Kirk Jr.](#), the Democrat appointed to the seat, was still a member of the Senate.

Democrats had discounted that possibility, which seemed all but dead Tuesday as Senator [Jim Webb](#), a Virginia Democrat and supporter of the measure, called for the Senate to take no votes on health care legislation until Mr. Brown could assume the seat vacated by the late [Edward M. Kennedy](#).

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