

ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE
Dr. James P. Eckman, President
Grace University, Omaha, Nebraska
30-31 January 2010

PERSPECTIVE NUMBER ONE

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SENATOR-ELECT SCOTT BROWN?

That Senator Ted Kennedy's Massachusetts Senate seat was won by a Republican is shocking. Its full significance may not be fully known for years, but we now know that his election will change the course of President Obama's administration. In this *Perspective*, let's think about this rather momentous development.

- First of all, Brown's election is a reaction to the current political culture of Washington, namely the arrogance of power of the Democratic majority in the Congress and in the White House. Several polls and an analysis just completed by the *Washington Post* indicate that the Democratic leadership in the House, the Senate and the White House believed they could force their agenda on the American people with no transparency (despite the President's promises to the contrary), facilitated by backroom deals (e.g., Ben Nelson and the deal with the unions who secretly won a five-year exemption from the tax on "Cadillac" health-care plans) all the while manifesting a sense that as leaders they know best! Despite all pronouncements from these leaders to the contrary, dissatisfaction with the direction of the country, antipathy toward federal government activism and opposition to the Democrats' health-care proposals drove the upset election of Senator-elect Scott Brown. The *Washington Post* poll and analysis demonstrated that 63% of Massachusetts special-election voters say the country is seriously off track and Brown captured 2/3rds of these voters in his victory. Nearly 2/3rds of Brown's voters say their vote was intended at least in part to express opposition to the Democratic agenda in Washington; and nearly half said that they were against the health-care legislation. In fact, health care and the economy were the most important issues driving the Massachusetts voters. Overall, just 43% of Massachusetts voters say they support the health-care proposals—and this is in the most liberal state in the union!

Primarily, the Obama coalition from 2008 that elected him in Massachusetts has splintered badly, just as the Virginia and New Jersey elections two months ago had demonstrated. The evidence is unmistakable. Independents, which in 2008 had elected Obama, swung massively against the Democrats: dropping 16 points in Virginia, 21 in New Jersey. Last Tuesday it was worse: Independents, who had gone 2-to-1 Republican in Virginia and New Jersey, now went 3-to-1 Republican in Massachusetts. And, the turnout in the special Massachusetts election was the highest for any nonpresidential election in 20 years. In short, the president and his congressional leaders, Nancy Pelosi and Harry Reid, are in political trouble. Their closed-door deals, their arrogance manifested in how they have rammed through health-care legislation, and their lack of bipartisanship have been rejected by the

voters of Virginia, New Jersey and now, quite unbelievably, by Massachusetts. It would not be incorrect to conclude that these Democratic leaders are evidencing not only arrogance but a demeanor of being totally out-of-touch with the American people. Scott Brown's argument that his Senate seat is "the people's seat" resonated with the people of Massachusetts.

George Will has written: "By promising to cast the decisive 41st vote against the president's health-care legislation, the Republican candidate forced all congressional Democrats to contemplate this: Not even frenzied national mobilization of Democratic manpower and millions of dollars could rescue one of the safest seats in the national legislature from national dismay about the incontinent government expansion, of which this legislation is symptomatic."

- Second, Scott Brown's victory sends a strong message that is ideological in content. George Will writes that "the essence of contemporary liberalism is the illiberal conviction that Americans, in their comprehensive incompetence, need minute supervision by government, which liberals believe exists to spare citizens the torture of thinking and choosing." Certainly, it is more than obvious that trust in government within this democratic-republic has fallen, precipitously! David Brooks points out that "the share of Americans who say the country is on the wrong track has risen. The share who call themselves conservative has risen. The share who believe government is 'doing too many things better left to business' has risen . . . Many Democrats, as always, are caught in their insular information loop. They think the polls are bad because the economy is bad. They tell each other health care is unpopular because the people aren't sophisticated enough to understand it." If Obama, Pelosi and Reid do indeed follow this logic, "it would be the act of a party so arrogant, elitist and contemptuous of popular wisdom that it would not deserve to govern." It seems to me that the American people want a government that serves a humble, helpful and supportive role to the central institutions of American life, not an arrogant, elitist set of paternalistic leaders who desire to foster greater dependency on a bloated, nearly bankrupt government. The current leadership cannot blame this remarkable defeat on George W. Bush, as they have tried to do with so many things over the last 12 months. Scott Brown ran a campaign targeting President Obama, Nancy Pelosi and Harry Reid—and the people of blue state Massachusetts thundered their support. A response of humility, not continued arrogance, is appropriate. We shall see how these leaders respond. Finally, it is imperative that the current Democratic leadership (Obama, Pelosi and Reid) be reminded that America remains a center-right nation. As mentioned, the number of people calling themselves conservative has increased, and the number calling themselves liberal has not. Further, disapproval of Obama, Pelosi and Reid flows directly from traditional conservative anxieties about government spending, taxing and meddling. Democratic Senator Evan Bayh perhaps said it best: "Whenever you have just the furthest left elements of the . . . party attempting to impose their will on the rest of the country, that's not going to work too well." The president, Pelosi and Reid must take what is happening in America seriously: Scale back health-care reform, take the deficit seriously and work with Republican leadership. The US government is on the "fiscal path of a banana republic" and the Democratic leadership is promoting a health-care plan that promises vast benefits while doing little to reduce costs. The arrogance with which these three have governed the last 12 months must be replaced by a humility that shows a deference to the wisdom of the American people. If they do not heed the true meaning of the

election of Scott Brown, not only will they suffer defeat but our nation will be perilously close to fiscal and political catastrophe. May God have mercy upon our nation.

See Michael Gerson in the *Washington Post* (22 January 2010); George Will in the *Washington Post* (21 and 24 January 2010); David Brooks in the *New York Times* (19 January 2010); Charles Krauthammer in the *Washington Post* (22 January 2010); Dan Balz and Jon Cohen in the *Washington Post* (22 January 2010).

PERSPECTIVE NUMBER TWO

ISRAEL AS A CHANNEL OF BLESSING

When God made his unconditional covenant with Abraham (see Genesis 12, 15, 17, etc.), He said that “in you all the nations will be blessed.” One of the Lord’s expectations was that His people, Israel, would be a channel of blessing for all of humanity. They would represent Him to the world. The Apostle Paul picks up on that theme in the book of Galatians when he argues that one of the key blessings God had in mind was the blessing of justification by faith, which came through Jesus. But wherever Jewish people have gone, they have been a channel of blessing for broader humanity. Consider two recent examples:

- First is Haiti. Ahead of almost all nations, Israel sent scores of doctors and other professionals to Haiti. Years of dealing with terrorist attacks combined with an advanced medical technology sector have made Israel one of the most nimble countries in disaster relief. By contrast, the absence of rich and powerful Persian Gulf nations in the relief effort has been glaringly conspicuous. The technology that Israel has utilized in Haiti is far beyond almost all nations who have sent aid. Israel seeks to be a blessing to the world—and their response in Haiti is a powerful illustration of that conviction.
- Second, consider these statistics. There are 17 million Jews worldwide—0.2% of the world’s population. But Jews make up 54% of the world chess champions, 27% of the Nobel physics laureates and 31% of the medicine laureates. Within the United States, Jews make up but 2% of the US population, but 21% of the Ivy League student bodies, 26% of the Kennedy Center honorees, 37% of the Academy Award-winning directors, 38% of those on a recent Business Week list of philanthropists, and 51% of the Pulitzer Prize winners for nonfiction. Within the nation state of Israel itself, Tel Aviv has become one of the world’s foremost entrepreneurial centers—a new silicon valley in fact. Columnist David Brooks writes that “Israel has more high-tech start-ups per capita than any other nation on earth, by far. It leads the world in civilian research-and-development spending per capita. It ranks second behind the US in the number of companies listed on the NASDAQ. Israel, with 7 million people, attracts as much venture capital as France and Germany combined.” Israel has used the present financial crisis in the world to solidify the economy’s long-term future by investing in research and development and infrastructure, raising some consumption taxes, promising to cut other taxes in the medium to long term. The financial giant Barclay’s argues that Israel is “the strongest recovery story in Europe, the Middle East and Africa.” Finally, the nation of Israel is nothing short of astounding in terms of its creativity, scientific genius and technological savvy. For example, between 1980 and 2000, Egyptians registered 77 patents

in the US. Saudis registered 171. Israel registered 7,652 patents!! The current Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, argues that Israel will become the Hong Kong of the Middle East, with its economic benefits spilling over into the Arab world. There is indeed some evidence that this is already occurring in Jordan and in the West Bank. However, nations such as Iran and Syria despise the success and innovation of Israel and seek to destroy it.

Israel is one of the smallest nations on earth, but its contributions to humanity are astonishing. Why is this so? There are many possible answers. But permit me to offer a theological one. God said to Abraham that in and through his descendants, the nations would be blessed. We are seeing that occurring before our very eyes. Further, God declared forthrightly in Ezekiel 36 and 37 that He would one day bring the Jewish people back to their homeland. We are seeing that very miracle occurring before our eyes. Finally, God said that He would bless those who bless you [the Jews] and curse those who curse you [the Jews]. The Jewish people are a miracle. That the Jewish people have survived phenomenal persecution over the last several thousand years has not caused their extermination or annihilation. They have endured, as God said they would. They are now coming back to their land and are indeed blessing all nations. The fundamental blessing of course has come through Jesus, the Messiah; the blessing of justification by faith is available to all. In Romans 11:25-26, the Apostle Paul declared that when the “fullness of the Gentiles has come in, . . . all of Israel will be saved.” The argument Paul is clearly making in all of Romans 9-11 is that we Gentiles should be thankful to God for the Jewish people because blessing has come through them, principally of course in the Lord Jesus. And, because of God’s grace, we Gentiles by faith are grafted into the tree of blessing—God’s covenant promises. God is not finished with the Jewish people. His plan and His redemptive purposes will be accomplished. What is occurring in the Middle East today is supernatural. God is making Israel a blessing to the nations. But the nations will turn on Israel and that will usher in a chain of events that will ultimately produce the return of Jesus Christ. So, we can only proclaim as did the early church--come quickly Lord Jesus!

See David Brooks in the *New York Times* (12 January 2010) and Ethan Bronner in the *Times* (22 January 2010).