

# THE PUNDITS COME OUT IN FORCE

✘ Much of the news media has, I think, treated Ted Kennedy's passing with the appropriate respect.

But a significant swath of pundits have leapt—without pause—into issuing projections about how Ted Kennedy's death will affect the health care debate. They are not, mind you, calling attention to how his passing changes the parliamentary landscape for the health care bill: noting that Dems will no longer have a filibuster-proof majority until such time as Massachusetts sends another Democrat to the Senate in the next five months or so, noting that one or two potentially appropriate replacements for Kennedy—like Ed Markey—would open up holes in key Committees in the House. They aren't so much noting the things that could change the debate: Obama adopting a different stance towards the HELP bill, for example, or naming the bill after Kennedy (which Senator Byrd has already called to do).

Rather, they are suggesting they know whether Kennedy's passing will make health care more or less likely; or make a bill with a public option more or less likely.

That pisses me off for a number of reasons.

First, such reflexive punditry—the urge to claim omniscience about politics—arises out of the 24-hour cable world, a need to fill time. Yet to so quickly jump to making pronouncements about whether Ted Kennedy's death is a "win" for progressive Democrats or conservative Democrats, Republicans, and their corporate backers (which is really what this is about) suggests the cable news channels have exhausted all the things they have to say about Kennedy, the man. Now, Teddy Kennedy's record of achievement in the Senate is a half-century testimony of all that progressives have brought to this country. And

if the cable news can spend a week paying tribute to Michael Jackson's half-century career in music, then they sure as hell can spend at least one day paying tribute to Ted Kennedy's half-century leading this nation. To so quickly turn his death into one event in a horse race dishonors the man and slights his great achievements.

But I'm perhaps most pissed about this urge to claim to know what will happen now because of the way I look on death. Today is a day to pay tribute to Ted Kennedy, absolutely. But it's also a day to reflect on what his life means, and to reflect on how—for those of us who honor that legacy—we can keep his dream alive through our own actions.

Today should be a day to reflect not on what will happen, but what each of us can do to make sure we influence what happens. Today should be a day we reflect on the possibilities and the challenges presented by the health care fight, not on events that some pundit imagines have already been determined.

Kennedy's death will change what happens with the health care fight in both tangible and intangible ways. But anyone who claims to know, now, how it will change things is just blowing smoke, posing as an omniscient actor in the face of unknowable potential actions. And that poser-pundit is effectively denying the possibilities of human organizing and action.

Ted Kennedy's life is, at its core, a lesson in how important a single person's actions can be, how much one person—believing in and fighting for what's right—can achieve. And if one person can make a difference, then no pundit can claim to know what the outcome of thousands of people trying to make a difference will be.