

## **Impression of Health Care Summit Depends Upon One's Viewpoint**

Partisan Democrats claim that last Thursday's Health Care Reform Summit convened by President Obama believe that momentum has once again shifted to the advantage of those legislators and interests that support comprehensive, broad-based reform. Republican leaders believe that the Summit gave them an opportunity to showcase their reform proposals to a national television audience and to point out flaws in the President's approach. But, most neutral parties have observed that the 7.5 hour session showed few areas of agreement between the parties but did display great ideological differences. These differences all but guarantee that a bi-partisan approach to national health care reform is not possible in 2010 as time grows short in this election year. Therefore, it is likely that Democrats will pursue a strategy that will not require any Republican support.

Maine's senior Senator Olympia J. Snowe shared a similar view in an interview on Friday with representatives of the Maine press. Neither of Maine's Senators participated in the Summit, although Senator Snowe was invited by the White House at the last minute. She felt that her presence would be not fair to the Republican leadership who had already picked representatives to the Summit.

Senator Snowe did believe that the Summit was constructive in the sense that it allowed the public to see "an unfettered and unfiltered discussion among both parties." Both Senator Snowe and Senator Collins have opposed the notion of the Democrats using the budget reconciliation process to pass health care reform legislation. This approach would not require a super majority (60 votes) in the Senate.

Senator Snowe has consistently expressed disappointment with the approach taken since her October 13th vote in favor of the Senate Finance Committee bill. Since that vote, the process went behind closed doors and more than a thousand pages of provisions were added to the base of what the Senate Finance Committee had developed. The Senator continues to believe that federal health care reform is essential, and noted on Friday that health insurance premiums in Maine had increased 349% in the last ten years.

The President is expected to announce his next steps toward a comprehensive reform by the middle of this week.