

BETTER THAN CLEARING BRUSH ... GETTING HELP FROM KENNEDY?



The AP and Politico have competing stories up speculating that—along with clearing brush this week—Obama might pay Ted Kennedy a visit. The AP, relying entirely on speculation, suggests a visit could be a big boost for Obama's efforts to pass health care reform, one of Kennedy's lifelong goals. The Politico, relying on an email from a Kennedy aide, says Obama is not and never was scheduled to visit Kennedy.

But a Kennedy aide said in an e-mail Friday that an Obama-Kennedy visit is not going to happen and was never in the works.

Given Kennedy's apparent health struggles of late, it may be that he's not up to meeting with Obama in the first place, and particularly not if Obama comes with press corps in tow.

That said, for the next week, Obama will be one 10 to 15 mile chopper ride away from the man who perhaps unexpectedly bestowed on Obama the Kennedy mantle—and in doing so, had a significant role in getting Obama elected. Obama owes Kennedy, Obama is flailing with legislation Kennedy cares deeply about, and this may be the last time Kennedy can collect on Obama's debts to him.

Therein may be the problem.

After all, the AP is correct that even reports of an Obama visit to Hyannisport would boost Obama's fortunes and presumably those of health care legislation. A visit followed by a call to "Do it for Teddy!" might inspire Democrats (and possibly some of Kennedy's close friends on the other side of the aisle) to pull together to get

this done.

But for what bill?

Discussions I've seen on a potential visit all focus on Obama's current trajectory, which appears to be an attempt to pass insurance company reform under the cover of public option kabuki. None of that discussion on a potential Kennedy visit focuses on the HELP bill—Kennedy's bill, shepherded through by Chris Dodd. One that resembles those passed through the House, including a public option.

If I were Kennedy, I wouldn't let Obama set foot in my house unless he promised to ditch the Rahm/Messina plan to follow the Baucus plan. If I were Kennedy, I'd use this opportunity to kick Obama's ass for embracing that fraudulent kabuki after all the things Kennedy has done to help Obama.

And if I were Obama, I might take that opportunity to pivot. To adopt Kennedy's bill, to ride the rising anger of the Democratic base and Kennedy's legacy to pass real health care reform.

Politico says it won't happen (though there's just enough flexibility of schedule and close press events built into Obama's transit to pull it off). But if it were, it'd be Obama's opportunity to come away fighting a fresh battle—the battle to pass Ted Kennedy's healthcare reform bill, to pass the Ted Kennedy Healthcare Reform Bill, rather than the corporatist crap for which he's currently flailing.

Update: Major Garrett tweets:

WH Spox Burton: "no plans" for Obama to visit ailing Sen. Kennedy. Plans can change, tho. Many expect they will.