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Sen. Ben Nelson (D-Neb.) said Monday that he would oppose any health care reform bill with a national insurance exchange, which he described as a dealbreaker.

"The national exchange is unnecessary and I wouldn't support something that would start us down the road of federal regulation of insurance and a single-payer plan," Nelson told reporters Monday.

If Senate Democrats still had 60 votes, this would matter a lot.

Before the Massachusetts election, the White House and Democratic leaders were attempting to negotiate a compromise that could win 60 votes in the Senate. And Nelson could have deprived House Democrats from securing what they have increasingly viewed as a must-have -- a national exchange rather than a series of state exchanges.

But for now, Democrats are trying to write a companion bill to the full Senate legislation that would need only 51 votes in the Senate. That means Nelson's threat to vote against any bill with a national exchange doesn't mean much.

Nelson knows it, too.

"Those who didn't want me to be the 60th vote, get their wish," he said.

A silver lining for Democrats: Nelson's statement underscores the difficulty they would have faced regardless of the Massachusetts race. Pelosi and Reid still would have struggled mightily to strike a deal

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that would have secured 218 votes in the House and 60 votes in the Senate.

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