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Grassley amendment makes Congress obtain coverage
from health care plan established in reform bill

WASHINGTON – Senator Chuck Grassley has won approval for his legislation to require that members of Congress and congressional staff access health insurance through the exchange that would be created by the health care reform legislation under consideration by the Finance Committee.

“The more that Congress experiences the laws we pass, the better the laws are likely to be,” Grassley said.

Members of the committee agreed through unanimous consent on Tuesday night to support the Grassley amendment. Senator Jim Bunning was a cosponsor of the amendment.

Currently, members of Congress and their staffs participate in the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program. The exchange that would be established by the pending legislation is modeled after this federal employees’ program and designed to give participants the same kind of choices and options for health care coverage as federal employees. It would allow individuals who don’t receive insurance from employers to purchase policies at group rates.

“My interest in having Members of Congress participate in the exchange is consistent with my long-held view that Congress should live under the same laws it passes for the rest of the country,” Grassley said.

In 1995, President Clinton signed into law the Congressional Accountability Act, which Grassley authored and fought for six years before it was enacted. Grassley’s Congressional Accountability Act gives employees of the legislative branch protections under 12 civil rights, labor and workplace safety laws by making those laws apply to Congress. Before enactment of the Congressional Accountability Act, Congress had exempted itself from these laws:

The Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967
The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990
Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964
The Employee Polygraph Protection Act of 1988
The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938
The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993
The Federal Service Labor-Management Relations Statute
Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970
The Rehabilitation Act of 1973
Veterans’ employment and reemployment rights at Chapter 43 of Title 38 of the U.S. Code
The Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification Act of 1989.

The Congressional Accountability Act was amended in 1998 to include certain provisions of the Veterans Employment Opportunities Act of 1998.