

United States Senate

For Immediate Release
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Coburn, Grassley, Burr, Vitter File Amendment to Enroll the President, Members of Congress and their Political Advisors and Staff in the Public Option

Invite all senators to cosponsor and call for a debate and vote

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) – U.S. Senators Tom Coburn, M.D. (R-OK), Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa), Richard Burr (R-NC) and David Vitter (R-LA) today filed an amendment to the Senate majority leader's health care bill that would enroll the President, White House staff, all Administration political staff, members of Congress and all congressional staff in the government-run public option. The amendment also fixes a carve-out to reflect the original intent of a Grassley amendment that made sure leadership and committee staff also would be subject to the proposed reforms.

"The President, members of Congress and others in our government can demonstrate leadership and confidence in the public option by enrolling themselves in the program. While I oppose the public option, Republicans and Democrats can agree that we should live under the laws we pass. I can also think of no better way to ensure that the public option is responsive to our citizens than by having the politicians in charge of the system enrolled in the same program. If a low-income, single mom has to wait in line for a life saving treatment, so should our national leaders and their families. Enrolling national leaders in the public option may be the best way to prevent the government from rationing care," Dr. Coburn said.

"The White House and cabinet secretaries are working very hard for this massive overhaul of America's health care system," Grassley said. "It's only fair that if this bill becomes law, these individuals should themselves be subject to the reforms. The same is true for congressional staff. Quietly carving out leadership staff and committee staff behind closed doors is unacceptable. If the reforms are as good as their supporters say, the reforms should be good enough for everybody."

"Many of my constituents have asked me whether politicians would be willing to put themselves and their families in a government-run health care plan if Congress approves this bill. While I do not support the creation of a new government-run plan, I do believe that the President, his Cabinet, and Members of Congress should have to live under such a plan if one is created," Burr said. "If this bill is good enough for the American people, it is good enough for Congress and the White House."

“If we’re going to move forward with this massive government-run health care program, then we need to ensure that members of Congress cannot exempt themselves and keep their current benefit package. Politicians should not be mandating that other Americans join a government health care program that they have no intention of joining themselves,” said Vitter.

Coburn and Grassley joined forces in the floor debate after having won approval of amendments in their respective committees to apply the new health reforms to members of Congress and staff. Coburn’s amendment in the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee passed with some Democratic support, and Grassley’s amendment in the Finance Committee received unanimous approval.

Last week, Grassley learned that staff members of Senate leadership offices and committees are exempted from the requirement that members of Congress and congressional staff get their employer-based health insurance through the same system that would apply to the rest of the country under the Senate majority leader’s health care legislation. Staff for the majority leader and Democratic committee chairmen wrote the bill behind closed doors. The carve-out came to light after Grassley asked the non-partisan Congressional Research Service to analyze the bill, and experts confirmed the carve-out.

The amendment filed today combines the Coburn and Grassley amendments, putting all members of the House and Senate and their staff in the public option in states that have one and in the exchange in states that opt out of the public option. The amendment fixes the majority leader’s omission of leadership and committee staffs. It also enrolls the President, the Vice President, White House staff, and all Administration political staff in the public option or exchange (depending on their state).

Coburn, Grassley, Burr, and Vitter urged all senators to join them as cosponsors of their amendment and encouraged Majority Leader Reid to schedule a debate and vote on the amendment at his earliest convenience.

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