



Congress to Receive ObamaCare Exemption

The White House has struck a deal with the  U.S. Congress that highlights the increasing disparity between lawmakers and the American people. Members of Congress will enjoy a regulatory fix that ultimately saves them thousands of dollars by allowing the federal government to continue subsidizing their health plans.

Dozens of lawmakers had threatened to retire early or simply quit because of fears that their health insurance premiums would drastically increase as a result of a provision found in the healthcare law. The provision at issue is called the Grassley Amendment, which states that the government may only offer members of Congress and their staff health insurance plans that are “created” in the bill or “offered through an exchange.”

Currently, aides and lawmakers are covered under a very generous federal health insurance package whereby the government subsidizes approximately 75 percent of the premiums; however, by 2014, with the possibility of lawmakers and aides being put onto the exchanges, health insurance costs would have skyrocketed.

But President Obama has agreed to what is ultimately a congressional exemption from ObamaCare. Market Watch [reports](#), “The Office of Personnel Management [OPM] now plans to rule that the government can continue to make a contribution to the healthcare premiums of the lawmakers and their staff, according to unnamed congressional sources and a White House official.”

Prior to the resolution, members of Congress had become increasingly fearful that they would lose valuable employees and lawmakers as a result of the Grassley Amendment.

Jo Bonner (R-Ala.), who had already planned to resign from Congress, stated, “I’ve lost one staffer who told me in confidence that he had been here for a number of years and the thought of losing the opportunity to keep his health insurance on Dec. 31 [forced him to leave]. He could keep what he had and on Jan. 1 he would go into that big black hole. And then I’ve got another staff member that I think it will be a factor as she’s contemplating her future.”

Throughout the year, Democrats and Republicans have discussed options to correct the problem, including administrative corrections.

“The leadership has assured members that fixing this issue is a top priority,” said one Democratic leadership aide. “This issue must be fixed by administrative action in order that the flawed Grassley Amendment’s spirit is honored and all staff and members are treated the same.”

Others bemoaned the uncertainty that came with the impending threat of increased healthcare costs and the impact they would have on the makeup of Congress.

“Between the constant uncertainty surrounding sequestration, and the likelihood aides will soon be paying for the subsidy portion of their health care coverage, congressional office budgets are being squeezed once again, and it’s causing a lot of concern amongst chiefs of staff regarding how to best handle the situation,” said one chief of staff to a senior Democratic member of the House. “Do we give



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raises to junior level aides so they can afford to pay for their higher health care costs, and if so, where do we find the funds to do so? Additionally, leadership has been relatively silent in terms of providing guidance to offices, which is frustrating.”

Much to the relief of these congressional employees, the OPM will be announcing that the “federal government will help pay the cost of premiums” on the new government-run “exchanges” for members of Congress and their staffs, who will “not be eligible for the law’s tax credits and subsidies to buy insurance.”

Of course, the deal struck between the White House and Congress is not likely to be well-received by the American people. The notion behind the Grassley Amendment is ultimately “what’s good for the goose is good for the gander.” Therefore, it stands to reason that if the provisions of ObamaCare are not sufficient for members of Congress, they are certainly not sufficient for the American people.

The Inquisitr writes, “Critics claim Congress’s Obamacare exception will allow government workers to ‘purchase the most expensive policy available on the exchange and you and I will pick up most of the tab.’”

Fox News’ Greta Van Susteren [railed](#) against the exemption in a blog post entitled in capital letters, “This will make you want to throw up!”

“It is indecent ... just wrong,” she wrote. “So let me get this straight ... they push Obamacare on every other American except themselves. Really? Unbelievable, isn’t it?”

Van Susteren also noted that Congress conveniently found a way to rush this deal before their August recess, but somehow could not find the time to address an expiring resolution that would prevent a possible government shutdown in 60 days.

“What matters to you and is their job to handle can wait until their 5 week vacation is over,” she opined. “What matters to them, gets done now, before their 5 week vacation.”

She concluded, “I really don’t know how members of Congress can sleep at night when they pull these stunts on the rest of America. I don’t know who voted how, but I want to know who voted for this. At the very minimum, this selfish vote should have been put at the back of the line.”

Granted, not all lawmakers are pleased with the arrangement.

Republicans such as Sen. David Vitter of Louisiana [spoke out](#) against the arrangement, calling it a “behind-closed-doors deal, announced right after Congress is safely away from the crime scene.”

“This is exactly why America rightly hates Washington,” Vitter charged. “Obamacare’s a train wreck, even for Congress. So it gets fixed — for Congress only. What the flip about fixing it for America?”

However, the decision on the White House deal may not be final, according to the *Daily Caller*, which [asserts](#) that the legality of the deal is questionable:

In fact, it runs 180 degrees counter to what the statute seems to say, and to what its authors claim to have intended. People in exchanges are supposed to get federal exchange subsidies, not federal workplace subsidies. OPM is saying the opposite. By what legal authority?

Likewise, the *Wall Street Journal* [reports](#):

This latest White House night at the improv is also illegal. OPM has no authority to pay for insurance plans that lack FEHBP contracts, nor does the Affordable Care Act permit either



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exchange contributions or a unilateral bump in congressional pay in return for less overall compensation. Those things require appropriations bills passed by Congress and signed by the President.

An official statement from the OPM will likely clarify some issues, but that is not expected until sometime this week.

Photo of U.S. Capitol building



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