

CQ NEWSMAKER TRANSCRIPTS  
Congressional Events  
Sept. 16, 2009

## Sen. Grassley Holds News Teleconference

[LIST OF SPEAKERS](#)

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GRASSLEY:

I'm ready. Hello?

STAFF:

Yes, sir.

GRASSLEY:

Yes, say, "Chuck Grassley's here." Are we ready for questions? I've got an opening statement.

STAFF:

OK.

GRASSLEY:

Are we ready?

QUESTION:

We're ready.

STAFF:

Yes, everyone's on the line for you, sir.

GRASSLEY:

OK. When -- when I'm done here with what I've been doing at the Judiciary Committee, you will call the names?

STAFF:

Yes.

GRASSLEY:

OK.

I just got done questioning FBI Director Mueller. He's testifying before the Judiciary Committee. Today's testimony is one of his semi-annual trips to the Hill for oversight.

I had two specific issues to raise with Director Mueller. These fall into the category of what I call oversight. I've been hounding the FBI to answer outstanding questions that I've had for the agency over a period of years.

One of the answers I have yet to receive was highlighted this morning in a story by the Associated Press about an inspector general's report, inspector general of the Department of Justice, reporting, showing great concern about the FBI and the Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms agency, whether or not they're working together for the American people.

I'm particularly worried, because the FBI and the ATF gave a briefing to our congressional staffs, both Republican and Democrat, about a year ago now, when the agencies assured us that they were working together and that we could rest -- I guess be rest assured.

If the Justice Department had given me a straight answer to my questions when I asked it nearly two years ago, the department might have gotten this problem taken care of and the taxpayers might not have to spend the money for yet another inspectors general report.

Secondly, I have concerns among the FBI toleration for whistleblowers. FBI whistleblower provisions in recently passed Homeland Security Committee legislation were removed over the summer. I have yet to find out who -- what's the point or who I can point my finger at in trying to figure out where these suggestions came from, including the White House, or did it come from the bureau?

So I want to know exactly where people stand on this whistleblower protection. And, unfortunately, Director Mueller this morning couldn't answer my questions. But I have every intention of keeping the pressure on.

He did say -- or he didn't know, that he would respond in writing. But -- but the department -- FBI responses go to that big black hole in the Department of Justice. You never seem to get -- get an answer.

So, you know, what I'm going to have to do is hold up nominees within the Justice Department until they answer my questions. After all, it shouldn't take a lot of hard work to answer a few questions.

Call the names, will you please?

STAFF:

Kerry Cathcart?

**QUESTION:**

Thank you. Senator Carter just recently said that he thought some of the animosity against President Obama's plans were racially based. Kind of a two-part question. What did you think about the comment in general? And specifically, when you had unhappy constituents in Iowa, did you have the sense that any of their unhappiness with the president had any racial overtones?

**GRASSLEY:**

I think there was at least one incident -- what town meeting, I don't know -- but there was at least one incident I can recall where there was a reference -- I don't know whether it was racial, as -- as it was just very denigrating. When -- I guess it was associated with Hitler or something like that. So maybe it's not fair for me to say that that's racial.

But, you know, first of all, I -- I've had a lot to do with Jimmy Carter, and I like him as an individual. And I don't know the motivation for his statement last night. I don't agree with it, because if I agreed with it, President Obama couldn't have been elected. I mean, there aren't enough African-American people in this country to elect their own.

So -- so from that standpoint, he was elected by the entire country. And I know that African-Americans overwhelmingly voted for him, but only by 3 or 4 percentage points more than they would have voted for a white Democrat. So I don't want to -- there's no way that -- that -- that just statistics of a campaign can uphold that sort of accusation.

But here's something -- I kind of sense coming from somebody that -- that there's an effort to promote that thought that anything that's negative about any of the president's programs might come because he's racial, because that point -- in other words, on at least two or three occasions during my town meetings, people who were very supportive of the president and his program indicated the same thing Jimmy Carter did yesterday, that a lot of these accusations are politically -- or racially motivated.

But in only one instance did anybody take offense to it. And in one of my town meetings, somebody stood up maybe 10 minutes later and said how they resented that sort of comment.

Let's go on.

**STAFF:**

Tony Leys, Des Moines Register?

**QUESTION:**

Senator, on Senator Baucus' proposal, how far away is it from something you could support? And -- and at this point, what are your main qualms with it?

GRASSLEY:

Well, I won't -- I won't -- I won't itemize my -- those, because I've put them out in a press release last night, so I won't have to repeat those. But I'll give you some idea of where there are some problems.

I think it was possible for us to move ahead. We were making considerable progress on very difficult issues. And a timeline of September the 15th, a timeline of getting something done on the floor by October, when large parts of these bills don't take effect until 2013, four years from now, you kind of wonder what -- if you want to get it right, what a few more things go into.

I can say, if he's sticking by what's considered the Baucus -- the Baucus framework, and I won't know for an hour, when he has his town -- or his news conference here, but a lot of those are things that I wouldn't even say are bipartisan. A lot of those, like the delivery system and rewarding health care delivery on quantity -- on quality instead of quantity or pay for performance, are just kind of givens that everybody agrees they need to be done. Now, there are -- there's a lot of things that fall into that category, but particularly in delivery.

So my answer to your question is, I'm not sure this process is over just because he's put a mark out. You know, there's -- there's a step of the committee. There's a step of the floor. And -- and we'll just have to work our way through it.

But I think you want to remember that I've tried to describe and probably haven't to you, Tony, but to a lot of other people that have asked questions, I've said something along this line. In the nine months that I've been working one on one with Baucus -- and the last three months, we've been working three on three -- there hasn't been harsh words said. There's been differences of opinion -- sometimes on some issues, like public option, strong differences of opinion -- but on -- on -- on some other things, just differences of opinion.

And a lot of those aren't resolved, as I laid out in my statement last night, and there's probably a lot of things that weren't in that statement last night that would fall into that category, but we had a collaborative process, and it was very congenial all the time.

And as we -- as we broke up last night for our two-hour meeting yesterday, it was still just as cordial. And I think you can tell from public statements that have been made by me and other Republicans to back that up.

STAFF:

Mike Myers?

QUESTION:

Senator, can you hear me?

GRASSLEY:

Yes. Yes, I can hear you. Mike?

QUESTION:

I don't -- can you hear me, Senator?

GRASSLEY:

Yes, I can hear you, Mike.

QUESTION:

OK. Well, you don't want to summarize, of course, and I respect that, but the bottom line here is...

GRASSLEY:

I kind of summarized last night, if you read my statement.

QUESTION:

Yes, I know. I have, sir. Thank you.

GRASSLEY:

OK.

QUESTION:

The bottom line is, you can't support this bill as it is now. I mean, there doesn't seem to be any wiggle room particularly.

GRASSLEY:

Well, don't forget, there's a lot of things that aren't decided yet, you know, that are in my list. So, obviously, but -- but why be negative about it that I can't support or support something? You know, because we had a rules of the -- of the six-person group that nothing was final until the whole thing was final, you know, so if you don't have the whole thing worked out yet, it would be intellectually dishonest for me to say, you know, I couldn't vote for it or vote for it. Let's see what the final package is.

All I know is, he's putting in his framework. But who knows what's going to take place in committee next week?

QUESTION:

Did you -- I know you have this group of six and you've had meetings with Senator Baucus over many months. In the last few days, did you and Senator Baucus get together privately, as current chairmen, former chairman, and kind of leadership on the committee, to try and work some of these things out, or has just been at kind of arm's length?

GRASSLEY:

No, I think -- I think we've -- everything -- every negotiation has involved this three on three.

QUESTION:

OK, thank you.

STAFF:

James Lynch?

QUESTION:

No question.

STAFF:

Mike Glover? Mike Glover?

Sue, WHO?

Courtney Blanchard?

QUESTION:

No question, thank you.

STAFF:

Ed Tibbetts?

QUESTION:

Hey, Senator, a couple of things I wanted to ask you about. In your statement, you mentioned wanting an alternative to the individual mandate. Can you explain what that means? What -- what sort of alternative are you looking for?

GRASSLEY:

The alternative would be setting up a risk pool for reinsurance, so that low-income people would have the capability of buying insurance, and not make it mandatory.

QUESTION:

What would that do to the numbers of -- what would that do to the ability to reach, you know, full coverage?

GRASSLEY:

OK, well...

QUESTION:

Are there estimates on...

(CROSSTALK)

GRASSLEY:

Might be a little short of the ideal, but I think the ideal would be about 95 percent, and let's say we're at 85 percent or 86 percent now. You'd fall somewhere between that 85 percent and -- and 95 percent.

And I think we've asked that question of the Congressional Budget Office, but we don't have an answer yet. And I think we were about ready to get an answer, except when Senator Baucus got pressure from Senator Reid and the White House to move ahead. They had -- CBO had to divert all their attentions to score the -- give a final score on the framework.

QUESTION:

And -- and what -- what -- I mean, if there is to be an individual mandate, what kind of impact would that have on -- on middle-income Iowans?

GRASSLEY:

Well, it probably wouldn't make as much of an impact in Iowa as it would in a lot of other states or be as helpful to hospitals and health providers in Iowa who are taking some cuts, you know, to raise revenue or offsets, because I think we're at 91 percent or 92 percent.

So if you've got a state like Florida that is at 75 percent of coverage, 25 percent of the people don't have it, and you're going to get up to 90 percent, then that sort of mandate is going to do more good for making up for loss of revenue from hospitals and doctors and other providers, you know, and maybe even pharmaceutical people because they're contributing something to offsets and -- and they're going to get a lot of revenue coming in from an individual mandate, whereas Iowa, you know,

wouldn't have that sort of leeway, if we've already got revenue coming in from 91 percent or 92 percent of our people that have insurance.

QUESTION:

So -- so not as much impact on -- on -- insofar as insuring more Iowans or in terms of the impact on those who might decide not -- not to get insurance?

GRASSLEY:

But you could -- you could have the contrary, though, that if my voluntary thing was put in place, and hospitals in Texas might look at it as negative, because it wouldn't be forcing a lot of income coming in from people who were covered, as opposed to the 25 percent that don't have coverage, that then it wouldn't have as negative an impact on Iowa as it would have on Texas, as an example.

QUESTION:

Bottom line, then, the mandate is more an issue for other states than it is for Iowa?

GRASSLEY:

Well, the mandate -- well, yes, but I think -- I didn't say this, so I don't expect you to anticipate it, but don't -- don't forget that -- don't forget that there's -- there's a philosophical point with the individual mandate, you know, that people compare it to making people buy car insurance.

But you don't have to -- you don't have to drive a car, you know, and then so you aren't hit by that, where this is going to hit everybody.

QUESTION:

I think the counterpoint to that is, is that you have something like this to prevent free riders.

GRASSLEY:

That's right.

(CROSSTALK)

GRASSLEY:

It's -- it's a very strong argument. And -- and I'm hoping that CBO can show that our substitute would -- would not be disastrous from that point of view. If it -- if it isn't, then it'll be easier to sell.

QUESTION:

Are -- are -- and I'll stop after this. If it doesn't show that, are you -- can you get over the philosophical hurdle and accept an individual mandate?

GRASSLEY:

You know what? This has just now come to the attention of most of the American people. And so I'm going to wait and see what -- what the reaction.

Based upon, you know -- it wouldn't be justified in saying that in every instance, but you get back to a very basic thing here. We're restructuring one-sixth of the economy, and it seems to me that you've got to have the support of the American people when you're doing that.

STAFF:

Tim Rohwer?

QUESTION:

I'll stop there. Thanks.

QUESTION:

Yes, Senator. I -- I know this is over in the House, but I was just kind of wondering, your thoughts on -- should Joe Wilson there -- should -- do you think he should have been formally rebuked for his comments? Or do you think the majority party was kind of trying to make more of this, a bigger issue than it was?

GRASSLEY:

Oh, of course. It was all political. And if it was something that was -- was just an issue of -- of -- if it was otherwise, they -- they would have accepted where the -- where the apology should have gone, and it did go to the president.

STAFF:

Christinia Cripes?

QUESTION:

Hi, Senator. I noticed that in your statement last night you talked about federal funding for abortion, illegal immigrants being two issues that you'd still -- that you still think need to be hashed out a little bit more. I was just wondering, because I've heard the argument that it's already protected in federal law that those things don't get federal funding. And I'm just wondering if you don't think that the current law is

enough or kind of what your specific issue is?

GRASSLEY:

Well, first of all, this might sound like a dispute between -- between Republicans and Democrats, but from a philosophical standpoint, both Republicans and Democrats say that they don't want illegal aliens to get it. So it's not a question of -- of the point that, do we have to agree that they shouldn't get it? We agree on that. There's some disagreement on exactly how to enforce it. And -- and Republicans are going to demand tight enforcement.

STAFF:

OK, we're through the entire list. Senator, the vote's almost up.

Thank you all very much.

GRASSLEY:

OK. Goodbye.

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### List of Speakers

SEN. CHARLES E. GRASSLEY, R-IOWA

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