

Sunday's Our View: Kudos to Grassley

Our Position: Call for immediate availability of amendments step in the right direction

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On Wednesday, Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, introduced a Senate resolution aimed at improving transparency in the legislative process. Grassley's resolution would make amendments to proposed legislation that senators file available online to the public – and make them available almost immediately.

As things stand now, it's not uncommon for numerous amendments to be filed to bills being debated by the Senate. Those amendments are already available –and available almost instantly – online to senators and congressional staff. However, those amendments are often not publicly available until The Congressional Record is printed the next day.

Grassley's resolution, which would be a binding requirement on the Senate and would become effective upon a Senate vote, would give the public the same level of access.

Referring to the availability of proposed amendments in The Congressional Record, Grassley said, "In a lot of cases, that may be too late. The Senate may have voted already on an amendment. Sometimes those amendments are enormous – like managers' amendments that can constitute an effective rewrite of the underlying bill – but even when they're narrow, their impact can be tremendous."

Speaking on the Senate floor Wednesday, Grassley said, "Today we make the vote count public on the Internet within an hour of when a vote takes place. But we might not make the substance of what we voted on available until the next day. So we let the public see how we voted, but we don't always let them see what we were voting on. That doesn't make sense.

"Shouldn't we have some kind of searchable system for amendments to allow our constituents the same access to information as a seasoned lobbyist or congressional staffer?"

There is already an Amendment Tracking System website that is only available to members of Congress and staff, a website that provides a copy of the amendment, the purpose, the sponsor and the status.

Grassley's resolution would make the Amendment Tracking System website or a similar website available to the public. "The general public gets to see exactly what we are seeing," Grassley told his colleagues. "They get the same information and can provide their input prior to a vote.

“There is a lot of distrust of government these days. People feel like Congress is ignoring them. Some of this is the result of the policies that are being considered around here. But it also has to do with the lack of transparency and accountability in government.

“This straightforward resolution will increase transparency, promote accountability and make us all better representatives of the people we serve.”

Grassley’s resolution will not correct all the ills of Congress, but the sunshine he calls for is a step in the right direction.