

Talking with Grassley

Senator listens at town hall meeting

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POSTED: April 6, 2010

Article Photo



Iowa Sen. Charles Grassley met with constituents in a town hall meeting Monday at the Iowa Lakes Community College auditorium. EDN photos by Michael Tidemann

"People are very, very concerned about the direction of the country and what's going on in Washington," Iowa Sen. Charles Grassley said to a good-sized crowd at the Iowa Lakes Community College auditorium Monday.

His comments were prophetic.

The hour-long session the senator had set aside for his town hall meeting did in fact reflect many public concerns - chiefly in the area of growing government control over small business and individual lives.

Marilyn Bose expressed concerns over privacy of medical records.

Grassley said while doctors can use the information, it could be used to the patient's detriment, as in England. "It determines value of life," said Grassley. "It determines treatment or not treatment."

Terry Bruns offered concerns over the renewable energy production incentive not getting funded. He said the U.S. Department of Energy was standing in the way.

Another constituent offered a number of concerns, starting with Medicare.

"If they eliminate the fraud in Medicare, that would go a long ways to straighten it out," he said.

He also offered concern about bitterness between political parties. "I'm not sure that we're going to survive this."

Yet another concern of the constituent was overregulation.

Grassley agreed about partisanship.

"There is too much and there's more than there has since I've been in the Senate," Grassley said. He did note though that while controversy makes news, not much was said about how he worked with Montana Sen. Max Baucus on health-care legislation.

"I'm willing to work with anybody that's willing to work with me," Grassley said.

Another constituent asked why Caterpillar and John Deere officials were being called before Congressional committees after saying mandated health-care legislation would force them to lay off employees.

Grassley said Congress has broad authority to call people to testify, and if they don't come willingly, they can be subpoenaed. He said what the company officials did was to meet their legal responsibility to make information known to the Securities and Exchange Commission. "They're doing it because the SEC is requiring them to do it," Grassley said.

Emmet County Republican Chair Paul Allis mentioned the Tea Party movement, saying it included members of both parties plus independents. "I think it's a good thing to put Republicans on the stump and put Democrats on the stump," Allis said.

Grassley noted that the Tea Party was comprised of 40 percent Republicans, 25 percent independents, and 13-15 percent Democrats.

Jim Boyer voiced concern about regulatory agencies that are not subject to checks and balances, particularly in the area of environmental regulation.

Grassley said there were three options: changing laws, Congressional veto and the courts.

Another constituent offered concerns on a number of veterans issues, including a Baptist minister from Topeka, Kan., who disrupts military funerals and veterans who were exposed to radiation during nuclear weapons testing then sworn to secrecy.

Addressing a question on amnesty for illegal aliens, Grassley said, "Right now I think it's kind of on hold."

Grassley said he voted for amnesty in 1986 when there were an estimated 3 million illegal aliens in the country. "I found out that if you reward illegality you get more of it," Grassley said.

The senator addressed a concern from Connie Greig regarding the sunset of former President Bush's tax cuts this year which include the estate tax.

"I would like to see them extend it as permanent law," Grassley said.

Grassley agreed with another constituent concern about unemployment. He said the federal debt, jobs and the recovery are what concerned Americans most last year, not health care. He said that was one reason why President Obama's popularity had declined.

Regarding a question from Bob Klein on insurance companies ramping up premiums for those with pre-existing conditions, Grassley said by 2014 increases will be capped. He did note that the cost of recently passed health-care reform from 2014-2024 will amount to \$2.5 trillion.

After the general town hall meeting, Grassley addressed a question regarding a lawsuit by 16 state attorney generals questioning the constitutionality of the health-care bill.

"I hope so (that the suit is successful) because I agree with it," Grassley said.

The senator also addressed the health-care bill in general.

"It didn't have to be done right now. It could have been done right," Grassley said. He said the Senate should have allowed him and Montana Democratic Sen. Max Baucus to finish hammering out a bill that would have been agreeable to both parties.

"This is the first real social change that hasn't had bipartisan support," Grassley said.