

Work for Iowans Continues in 112th Congress

Written by Sen Chuck Grassley
Tuesday, 11 January 2011 08:31

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by U.S. Senator Chuck Grassley

Friday, January 7, 2011

The 112th Congress convened in January, with newly elected and reelected lawmakers taking the oath of office to “support and defend the Constitution.” It was an honor to reaffirm my allegiance to the U.S. Constitution and pledge to faithfully uphold my duties as a U.S. senator for Iowa for another term.

In a new congress, committee compositions change to reflect the new ratio of the majority to minority members of the U.S. Senate. Each party sets its own rules to determine committee assignments. Over the years, I’ve worked to secure key committee assignments. Building seniority from these various posts provides a platform to work for a more accountable government and to make Iowans’ voices heard on issues that hit close to home, especially those that impact working families, students, veterans, small business owners, family farmers and retirees.

In addition to the legislative and oversight responsibilities, the U.S. Senate also has the Constitutional authority of “advice and consent” and must approve nominations and treaties submitted by the President. To gain a more thorough understanding of the issues -- from taxes, to transportation, national security, energy, agriculture, education, health care, banking, immigration and trade -- the Senate divides its work into 20 standing committees, 68

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subcommittees and four joint committees which review and research policy proposals, convene hearings to field input from policy experts on pending bills, conduct fact-finding investigations and fine-tune legislation for consideration by the full Senate.

More than 3,000 bills are introduced each Congress and referred to the respective committee of jurisdiction for scrutiny. The committee system allows lawmakers to develop expertise and specialize in specific issues.

In the last decade, I used my leadership position (alternating between Chairman and Ranking Member) on the tax-writing Senate Finance Committee to advance the landmark 2001/2003 tax relief laws that lowered the federal tax rates on wages and investment. Before the lame-duck session of Congress adjourned in December, I successfully pushed to extend these tax breaks for another two years. Separately in that legislation, I won extension through 2011 of provisions for ethanol and biodiesel that are so important to domestically produced renewable energy and national security.

In other examples, I've used my assignment on the Senate Budget Committee to tighten the federal purse strings and urge big spenders to end the cycle of deficit spending. Both on and off the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee, as one of only two working family farmers in the Senate, I've championed the interests of the nation's producers to earn a good living and provide for the nation's food and energy security.

I will continue to serve as a senior member of the Finance Committee, but because of Republican Caucus term limits on committee leadership positions, I'm moving from the position of Ranking Member of the Finance Committee to Ranking Member of the Judiciary Committee. Since taking my first oath of office in the Senate, I've been able to serve on the influential Judiciary Committee. It's where I launched my crusade to empower whistleblowers to expose fraud against the taxpayers. My 1986 amendments to the False Claims Act (a Civil-War era law) have helped the U.S. government recover more than \$25 billion that otherwise would be lost to fraud. The U.S. Justice Department also credits my updates to the False Claims Act with deterring untold billions more that otherwise would have been lost to fraud. Most recently, I strengthened additional whistleblower tools that were included in the Fraud Enforcement Recovery Act of 2009 to help plug legal loopholes used in court to escape accountability. I'm keeping the heat on the federal bureaucracy to fight fraud with criminal prosecutions right now, too, asking both the Justice Department and the Department of Health and Human Services to account for stagnant prosecution numbers despite increased federal spending to target health care fraud.

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I also intend to continue scrutinizing concentration in the agricultural industry. It seems to get continually more difficult for the independent producer to capture a fair share of the food dollar due to consolidation.

I also will continue to work to reduce the cost of pharmaceutical drugs with pro-consumer legislation to make generic options available as quickly as possible. And, the Ranking Member position on the Senate Judiciary Committee is responsible for rigorous review of lifetime appointments to the federal bench, including the Supreme Court of the United States.

As Congress gets down to the people's business in the New Year, I encourage Iowans to keep in touch. 21st century technology gives democracy even more opportunities to keep our two lanes of communication well traveled, from e-mail to interactive webcasts. I also hope to see many of you face-to-face in 2011 during my constituent meetings.

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