

Grass Roots Representation by U.S. Senator Chuck Grassley

Written by Sen. Charles Grassley
Wednesday, 04 September 2013 11:51

Just before Labor Day, I wrapped up 15 county meetings in Northwest Iowa. Since Iowans first hired me to represent them in the U.S. Senate in 1980, I've held at least one meeting in each of Iowa's 99 counties every year. Iowans are my boss. As workers across Iowa know, keeping on top of what's on the mind of your boss is important to doing a good job and keeping it. Representative government is a two-way street. That's why I make it a priority to keep in touch with Iowans. My annual road trip across the state adds up to an invaluable give-and-take that strengthens our system of self-government.

Despite deep-rooted cynicism about dysfunction in Washington, Iowans are active, vocal and respectful participants. Levels of engagement ranged from downright fired up to earnest curiosity. Iowa's longstanding record of civic participation in electoral politics and public policy leaves little room for apathy. That's good news for making sure that our government works of, for and by the people.

Issues such as immigration, health care, employment, education and government overreach generated the most outspoken reaction among those who attended my meetings throughout the year. Getting the economy back to life, tax-and-spending issues, gas prices, renewing the farm bill and U.S. military action in Syria also shared widespread concern.

Attendance ranged from a few dozen to more than 100 people. When elected members of Congress hear unfiltered feedback from the grass roots, they can better understand how decisions made in Washington are impacting employers, workers, families, students and retirees. By scheduling meetings in libraries and community centers, I want to foster an open dialogue with a cross-section of the public. Visiting schools and touring manufacturing facilities, hospitals and other businesses allows me to bring my question-and-answer format to those who otherwise wouldn't be able to attend a meeting during the workday. These workplace visits, in particular, provide a good opportunity to discuss how regulatory and tax policy decisions influence job creation, business expansion, workplace safety and health insurance. Plus, it's always worthwhile to get to see in person Iowa's impressive scope of products and services in the marketplace. It's good to see and hear how hard-working Iowans are helping to grow the local economy, create jobs, and build vitality and pride in our hometown communities.

Listening and visiting with Iowans is one of the most rewarding responsibilities of my job as Iowa's senior U.S. Senator. A few grass roots' concerns I've recently put on Washington's radar screen include:

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- Seeking greater transparency and accountability from the National Security Agency, I've asked the Inspector General to check into NSA employees who intentionally may have abused surveillance authorities. Congressional oversight serves an essential role in our system of checks and balances to protect Constitutional boundaries and national security interests of the American public.
- Advocating for nursing home residents who are receiving unnecessary anti-psychotic prescriptions and the taxpaying public's footing the bill.
- Working to shield college-bound students from soaring tuition and student debt by holding tax-exempt institutions of higher learning to account for their spending decisions and seeking user-friendly tools to help families better understand college costs and types of student aid.
- Tracking effectiveness of the 2010 Physician Payments Sunshine Act, a bipartisan law I championed to bring transparency to the financial ties between doctors and drug companies as taxpayers pick up the tab for billions of dollars of public health spending through Medicare, Medicaid, veterans benefits and starting next year, federal subsidies flowing through the Affordable Care Act.

Lawmakers return to a full plate of business after returning to Washington in September. First, Congress will consider the President's proposal to use military force in Syria. Work on tax-and-spending issues will take center stage as Congress sets funding levels for the new fiscal year starting Oct. 1. Washington also must address the \$16.7 trillion debt limit. The Treasury Department expects to hit its borrowing authority by mid-October.

Throughout my 99 county meetings in 2013, one grass roots refrain shared from one side of the state to the other had a similar chorus: disgust with Washington's spinning merry-go-round of debt and deficits. Iowa households must make tough decisions to make ends meet, and it's time for Washington to get real on reining in runaway spending. Iowans can be certain I will put that grass roots message squarely on Washington's radar screen during the looming debate on raising the debt limit.

Wednesday, September 4, 2013