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Senator Chuck Grassley  
Remarks on the Graham Amendment on Prescription Drugs  
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I rise to oppose the amendment before us. For the third time in as many weeks, a mostly partisan Democrat prescription drug bill is about to fail on this floor. And beyond failing here, today's amendment fails seniors and taxpayers as well. It fails seniors because it fails to cover most of them. From what we know of the proposal – and we're only this afternoon getting the details – most middle income seniors will get nothing, nothing at all, when it comes to prescription drug coverage. It fails taxpayers because it does so at an extremely high cost.

My friends on the other side of the aisle have accomplished quite a feat – they've managed to write a Medicare prescription drug proposal that does less with more money.

Their proposal provides generous coverage to beneficiaries below 200% of poverty. There's nothing wrong with that. I agree that scarce resources should be used wisely by Congress to target money where it's needed the most.

However, their proposal provides almost no assistance to Medicare beneficiaries whose incomes exceed \$18,952 a year.

A senior at 201% of poverty will receive no meaningful coverage under the Graham proposal until she has spent 17% of her income on drugs. A married couple at 201% of poverty will spend 25% of their annual income on drugs before both gain catastrophic coverage protection.

To make matters worse, 3/4 of seniors above 200% of poverty have other prescription drug coverage. Since these plans cover some drug expenses, and because the Graham plan does not have a basic benefit, these folks will receive no help even if they have total drug expenses over \$3,300.

A typical senior above 200% of poverty will receive approximately \$6 of assistance every month toward their prescription drug expenses.

Now, the Congressional Budget Office has given Graham a preliminary cost estimate of \$389.5 billion. Keep in mind, though, that CBO did not have legislative language to review at the time they completed their cost estimate.

So, depending on what legislative language is included in the Graham proposal – it could cost more than \$400 billion.

The Tripartisan bill with an official CBO cost estimate of \$370 billion provides a solid

benefit for all Medicare beneficiaries. Lower-income enrollees are provided with additional protections, which, as I said before, is appropriate.

What the Tripartisan bill has that Graham doesn't is a significant drug benefit for every single Medicare enrollee. Under our 21<sup>st</sup> Century Medicare Act, enrollees will save on average 50% off their drug bills. And, lower-income enrollees will see a 95% savings in their drug bills. The Graham bill fails these people. It fails them badly.

Indeed, these failures amount to a massive failure for this body. Under the Senate leadership, Democrats and Democrats alone have tried to write partisan legislation on the Senate floor time and time again this summer. Well, Mr. President, that's gotten us nowhere. It's led to chaos, to partisanship and, as I said just a minute ago, to failure.

So, where are we now? It looks like we're ready for another mostly partisan vote on a pretty much partisan bill. Another vote that will fail to get 60 votes, and will fail to give seniors the help they need. We could have been somewhere far different from this. The House passed a bill. We could have been in conference with the House at this point. The President wants a bill. We could have even been in the Rose Garden.

The Majority Leader says he wants a bill, but what's taken place here over the last three weeks means he really wants something else: an issue. Had regular order been followed, had the Finance Committee been given the right to work its bipartisan will, we could have had far more than just an issue.

The sponsors of the Tripartisan bill, the only bipartisan bill in all of Washington to provide comprehensive, universal coverage at a cost that's far lower than the amendment before us now, were ready and willing to talk to anyone about compromises. We still are.

But we were denied the right to a markup in the Finance Committee. I believe that if it had been given the chance to work its will, the Finance Committee would have reported out a bipartisan proposal, based on the Tripartisan 21<sup>st</sup> Century Medicare Act we introduced earlier this month.

I've said it before, everyone in this chamber knows that for anything of this magnitude to pass – and adding a prescription drug benefit to Medicare is the single greatest entitlement expansion in history -- it needs to get 60 votes.

And everyone in this chamber knows that the only way to get 60 votes is to have bipartisan support. The proper place to find bipartisan support is in the Finance Committee, not on the Senate floor.

I ask unanimous consent to insert the text of a letter from various patient groups opposing this legislation.