



Another double standard

August 9th, 2013

And they wonder why respect for those on Capitol Hill and in the White House runs a bit low these days.

The Affordable Care Act, also known as Obamacare, mandates that everyone have health insurance, and Sen. Charles Grassley, R, Iowa, introduced a measure in 2009 to make sure his colleagues and their staffers were included.

According to the Wall Street Journal, Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nev., later revised Grassley's idea but did not address contributions toward premiums the government provides its employees.

Michael Cannon, director of health policy studies at the Cato Institute, says the benefit is worth from \$5,000 to \$11,000 annually to each member of Congress and staffers.

Beyond that, members of Congress make an annual salary of \$174,000, meaning they and some top aides would not qualify for subsidies allowed under Obamacare.

So besides losing coverage under the Federal Employees Health Benefit Program and being forced into the insurance exchanges, 11,000 Congressional staffers, representatives and senators "could be exposed to thousands of dollars a year in out-of-pocket insurance costs," according to the Wall Street Journal.

Yes, they could be. But they won't be.

President Obama and the Office of Personnel Management on Aug. 1 granted an exemption, a waiver, if you will, in effect restoring the \$5,000 to \$11,000 pay cuts, according to Cannon.

The Wall Street Journal explains the bottom line: "In any case the carve-out for Congress creates a two-tier exchange system, one for the great unwashed and another for the politically connected."

No surprise.

The newspaper points out other problems: The Office of Personnel Management "has no authority to pay for insurance plans that lack (Federal Employees Health Benefit Program) contracts, nor does the Affordable Care Act permit either exchange contributions or a unilateral bump in congressional pay in return for less overall compensation."

"Those things require appropriations bills passed by Congress and signed by the president," according to the newspaper.

"So the White House is once again rewriting the law unilaterally, much as it did by suspending Obamacare's employer mandate for a year," the Journal adds.

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