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Opening Statement of Senator Chuck Grassley
Senate Finance Committee Hearing on S.1673: the
Promoting American Agricultural and Medical Exports to Cuba Act of 2007
Tuesday, December 11, 2007

Our current policy toward Cuba is designed to weaken the dictatorial regime of Fidel Castro and his brother, Raul Castro. In order to isolate the Castro government, we significantly restrict our economic interactions with Cuba — including travel to that country. Some in Congress have come to question this policy. They contend that the continuing hold on power by Fidel and Raul demonstrates that our policies aren't working. They have called, in varying degrees, for changes in our relations with Cuba.

Other members of Congress remain committed to continuing our current policies. They believe that now is not the time to pull back on our efforts to put pressure on the Cuban government. After all, although Fidel Castro has provisionally passed the reins of power to his brother, Raul, the Cuban government remains as oppressive as ever.

Given the current leadership situation in Cuba, now is perhaps an appropriate time to review the status of our bilateral relationship. Chairman Baucus has sparked this discussion by introducing his bill, the *Promoting American Agricultural and Medical Exports to Cuba Act of 2007*. This bill focuses largely on agricultural trade between the United States and Cuba. Over the years, I've supported efforts to expand exports of U.S. agricultural commodities to Cuba. Iowa's farmers have benefited from agricultural sales in that country that were made possible through the *Trade Sanctions Reform and Export Enhancement Act of 2000*.

In addition, the lifting of restrictions on U.S. food exports has served an important humanitarian purpose. Cuba's socialist agricultural system is inefficient, and U.S. agricultural exports to Cuba provide needed nutrition to the Cuban people. Likewise, I support for humanitarian reasons the ability of U.S. exporters to ship medicines and medical supplies to Cuba. That said, I'm skeptical of efforts to further broaden our bilateral economic relationship until we see meaningful democratic reform in Cuba. Until there are free elections in Cuba, I strongly doubt that the appalling human rights situation there will improve to any significant degree. I look forward to hearing from today's witnesses on these important issues.