



Committee On Finance

Max Baucus, Ranking Member

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Baucus to Introduce Comprehensive Middle East Trade Initiative; Welcomes President's Proposal to Expand Trade to the Region

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) U.S. Senate Finance Committee ranking member Max Baucus today welcomed the Bush Administration's proposed plan to increase trade between the United States and the Middle East, a course that the Senator has been urging for months.

"I'm encouraged that the Administration shares my view that America can and should use trade policy to improve our economic and political ties with the countries of the Middle East and Muslim world," Baucus said. "Increased trade will be vital in the coming months and years as we work to strengthen our relationship with the Iraqi people and help them rebuild their country."

Earlier this year, Baucus proposed creating a trade program for the countries of the Middle East and Muslim world modeled on successful existing programs for sub-Saharan Africa and the Andean region. Under the program, countries that meet certain criteria, such as having a market-based economy and supporting the U.S. war on terrorism, would be able to export certain goods to the United States tariff free.

The proposal is intended to help diversify and improve the economies of the Middle East and Muslim world and provide jobs for the rapidly growing population in those countries. In addition, Baucus added that increased trade will also provide jobs and opportunities for American workers and businesses.

"Not only will we extend our trust and goodwill by opening our markets, but by helping to strengthen economies throughout the Middle East, we will also increase the number of people who can afford to purchase American products and services," Baucus said. "That means increased export opportunities for American businesses and more jobs for American farmers and workers."

While applauding President Bush's engagement on the issue, Senator Baucus emphasized the need for short-term action. "A free trade area in the Middle East by 2013 is a good long-term goal, but people in the Middle East need our help now," Baucus said. "My proposal would bring the benefits of trade to the people of the countries in the Middle East and Muslim world in a much shorter time. And it would help those countries make the significant economic reforms they will have to make before a free trade agreement can become a realistic option."

Baucus plans to introduce Middle East trade legislation in the coming weeks.

