



# Committee On Finance

Max Baucus, Ranking Member

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## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Baucus Urges Administration to Focus on Trade Preference Program with Middle East**

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) U.S. Senator Max Baucus today contacted U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell to applaud the Administration's stated goal of working to increase trade with the Middle East, while recommending a Middle East trade preference program as the most effective route to realizing increased trade in the short-term. In the letter to Secretary Powell, Baucus urged the Administration to work to seek passage of the Baucus-McCain "Middle East Trade and Engagement Act" in conjunction with the "African Growth and Opportunity Act."

Full text of letter follows:

January 15, 2004

The Honorable Colin L. Powell  
Secretary of State  
United States Department of State  
2201 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Powell:

I read in your *New York Times* op-ed on New Years' Day that the Administration plans to put trade with the Middle East "high on the agenda" in 2004. I applaud your commitment to this issue.

As you may know, last year Senator McCain and I introduced S. 1121, the Middle East Trade and Engagement Act. This bill seeks to create a trade preference program for countries in the Middle East similar to the preference program for sub-Saharan African countries created by the African Growth and Opportunity Act ("AGOA"). I fully support the Administration's long-term goal to create a U.S.-Middle East free trade area by 2013, but I believe more needs to be done in the short-term to help Middle East economies.

Free trade agreements can be excellent vehicles for economic growth, but they take time to negotiate, and the negotiations consume precious USTR resources. The Middle East Trade and Engagement Act could extend the benefits of trade to all eligible countries in the Middle East in a much shorter time than it would take to negotiate with all those countries, and without requiring

many USTR resources. AGOA has created hundreds of thousands of jobs and provided hope to people in sub-Saharan Africa. There is no reason why an analogous program for the Middle East cannot similarly provide jobs and hope to people in that region.

I understand that the Administration will seek passage this year of a bill to improve certain aspects of the AGOA program. I believe it would make sense to consider that trade preference bill – called “AGOA 3” – in conjunction with the Middle East Trade and Engagement Act. I look forward to working with you on that effort, and on helping to improve the economies of the Middle East through trade.

Sincerely,

Max Baucus

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