



Committee On Finance

Max Baucus, Ranking Member

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Statement of U.S. Senator Max Baucus

Mark Up of the United States-Bahrain Free Trade Agreement

Just one week ago, my colleagues and I came together to consider the United States-Bahrain Free Trade Agreement. Today we take the next step in the process Congress created to oversee the administration's trade policy by officially reporting the legislation to implement the Agreement.

The Finance Committee has agreed to take the unusual action of having the markup occur outside of the Finance Committee hearing room during a Senate floor vote. I did not agree to deviate from our normal process lightly. But given the press of time, how hard the Bahrainis have worked to meet the concerns of Congress, how broad support in the Congress is for this agreement, and how long this agreement has waited to be considered, I felt the circumstances justified the deviation.

Last week, I said that I supported an FTA with Bahrain. The freest economy in the Arab world, Bahrain is steadfast in its friendship to the United States, committed to reform, and resolute in its vision for a dynamic and open economy. I am glad that today we are one step closer to realizing this agreement.

During last week's hearing, I also stated my concerns. Chief among them was the need to monitor Bahrain's bold commitment to dismantle its recognition of the Arab League boycott of Israel. I also noted that Bahrain had yet to live up to its commitments to reform its labor laws. But I said I was confident Bahrain would do so and the agreement would secure a wide margin of support.

I am glad that my concerns – and those of my colleagues – did not go unheeded. The administration has promised to monitor Bahrain's commitment to dismantle its boycott of Israel, and reinforced this pledge in black and white in the Statement of Administrative Action. For its part, the Government of Bahrain has agreed to address the shortcomings in its labor law.

This recent progress on the boycott and labor reforms proves the importance of Congress in the administration's trade policy. It proves the importance of openness and dialogue. And it proves what we can do when we work together.

I congratulate the United States Trade Representative and the Bahraini government on their hard work. I support this agreement and will work to see it passed.

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