



For Immediate Release
June 24, 2008

Contact: Erin Shields
(202) 224-4515

**BAUCUS QUESTIONS TRADE AGENCIES ON PROGRESS
TOWARD SAFER BORDERS, SWIFTER COMMERCE**

*Five trade agencies offer testimony on 2008 trade-related priorities,
resources needed to meet agency goals*

Washington, DC - Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.) today questioned witnesses from Customs and Border Protection (CBP), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the Treasury Department, the International Trade Commission (ITC), and the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) as to the agencies' ability to enforce trade laws and agreements, secure the borders, and protect U.S. business interests. Baucus pressed Customs and Border Protection Commissioner W. Ralph Basham about what specific steps are being taken to ensure that American businesses can engage effectively in international commerce and to protect U.S. competitiveness while keeping America's borders secure.

"I'm not yet convinced that you struck that right balance between commerce and border security. I'm generally convinced that you don't pay enough attention to the commerce side of your duties," said Baucus. **"What can you say about what you're doing to address American business concerns? What can you quantify? Do you have benchmarks? Do you have a time table?"**

In response, Basham emphasized the agency's efforts to identify the areas that posed the greatest threat, and implementing security measures to address those risks, while keeping in mind the effect that all security measures have on businesses and commerce.

"U.S. imports and exports drive America's competitiveness," said Baucus. **"As our first line of defense, Customs and Border Protection needs to do a better job to facilitate trade -- and America's economic security -- at the same time that it safeguards our national security."**

Baucus has said he plans to introduce a Customs Reauthorization bill this year. The bill will ensure that CBP and other agencies prioritize trade facilitation and enforcement, and have adequate resources to fulfill this important mission.

###