



Committee On Finance

Max Baucus, Ranking Member

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BAUCUS AND DOOLEY LAUNCH INVESTIGATION OF FTA PRIORITIES

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) In a letter dated June 5, 2003, Senator Max Baucus, Ranking Democrat on the Senate Finance Committee, and Congressman Cal Dooley (D-Calif.) requested that the General Accounting Office launch an investigation into how the Bush Administration makes decisions regarding the selection of free trade agreement negotiating partners and the allocation of negotiating resources.

"Since we passed the Bipartisan Trade Promotion Authority Act last year, there has been a significant increase in the number of bilateral and regional FTAs under negotiation and in the negotiating resources devoted to them," Baucus said. "I have always supported trade liberalization and I believe that FTAs can offer important opportunities to American farmers, workers, and businesses. But I am increasingly concerned about the lack of an organized and transparent process for selecting future FTA partners. Our negotiating resources are finite, and I want to be sure we are putting them to the best possible use."

"I have always supported liberalizing trade because it opens more markets for American goods and services and creates greater opportunities for American businesses and workers," Dooley said. "We must have a strategic roadmap, guided by our economic and geopolitical interests, to determine which FTAs to pursue. That is why we have requested that GAO take a comprehensive look at the criteria and processes that are currently used in the selection of new FTA partners."

"Our window of opportunity is closing," Baucus said. "Two or more ongoing FTA negotiations are scheduled to be completed before the end of this year, and several countries are waiting in the wings for the launch of new talks. That is why it is so critical that GAO complete its work by the fall."

"This GAO investigation is one part of our larger effort to understand and shape the criteria that should guide the selection of future FTA negotiating partners," Dooley added. "Senator Baucus and I are also working to incorporate the input of numerous trade stakeholders in deciding how to best pursue new FTAs."

Results from the GAO study will be available this fall.

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