



# Committee On Finance

Max Baucus, Ranking Member

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## NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release  
Thursday, November 20, 2003

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### Statement of U.S. Senator Max Baucus Senator Comments on Opening of Free Trade Area of the Americas Meeting

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) U.S. Senator Max Baucus, Ranking Member of the Senate Finance Committee, released the following statement regarding the Eighth Ministerial meeting of the Free Trade Area of the Americas, which opened today in Miami, Florida:

“Today, trade ministers from 34 countries in the Western Hemisphere began consideration of draft text to create a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). Already, many people have criticized the draft text as weak and unambitious. Like many of my colleagues, I too desire a fully comprehensive and ambitious FTAA – one that is built on a strong set of commitments common to all participants and includes obligations in every negotiating sector.

From my perspective, I would like to see an agreement that is aggressive in removing market access barriers, *especially* in agriculture, and that promotes strong rules and capacity building in labor and environment standards. Our producers, businesses, and workers deserve nothing less.

On the whole, I am disappointed that we have not yet secured a consensus to move forward in a comprehensive and ambitious way. I am further disappointed that the draft text **does not** make clear that the negotiating mandate extends to trade-related labor and environmental standards, as any text without these standards would violate the Trade Act and be unacceptable to Congress.

Still, I recognize that it is important to maintain forward progress. This can be a frustratingly slow process, but we must be patient and resolute. As Ambassador Zoellick himself has noted, this agreement will be judged on its final results.

An agreement that falls short of a comprehensive and ambitious set of common obligations will face a difficult road toward congressional approval. Therefore, I urge all negotiators to remain focused on the original goal of full hemispheric economic integration.”

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