



For Immediate Release
March 6, 2008

Contact: Carol Guthrie
202-224-4515

**Hearing Statement of Senator Max Baucus (D-Mont.)
Regarding the 2008 Trade Agenda**

One-hundred-and-fifty years ago, tens of thousands of prospectors came to Montana, hoping to tap promised riches in the hills. Some held visions of gold. Others sought silver and copper. In a day's work, a prospector's claim could yield a fortune, or a day's wages, or nothing but sore muscles.

There was just one way to find out what a day's work could bring: You put your back into it, and kept digging.

Looking at our trade agenda for the remaining months of 2008, we have chances like those prospectors. We could hit a rich vein of productivity and accomplishment. Or we could come up empty-handed. Or we could come out somewhere in between.

There's only one way to find out. We need to put our backs into it, and keep digging.

Optimism is in my Montana blood. I hope our year will end in a rich payday for America's workers, ranchers, and farmers. Our work this year can put our economy on a path to greater wealth, stronger productivity, and more vigorous international engagement.

I have made clear where our work must begin: We must begin with reform, expansion, and implementation of Trade Adjustment Assistance. After listening to my constituents, my Colleagues, and my conscience, I am certain that we must put a better TAA program in place before Congress can move on to other trade priorities, especially pending free trade agreements. I say this not do be rigid, but to do right by America's workers, ranchers, and farmers.

I have also been clear about what a new TAA program must look like. It must cover services workers and workers whose jobs are offshored to China, India, and other non-FTA partner economies. It must enhance the health care tax credit. It must boost retraining funds that help displaced workers to get back in the labor force. And it must help communities — like Montana's lumber communities — that are negatively affected by unfair trade.

--more--

This year, we also have an opportunity to help America's consumers by safeguarding our borders. But we must meet the responsibility of border enforcement and security without sacrificing trade facilitation and enforcement. This Committee will do so by reauthorizing Customs and Border Protection.

We can pursue a bill that will put more resources at our nation's borders to ensure that imports of food and consumer goods are safe and healthy. Our bill will buttress our ability to identify, destroy and keep pirated and counterfeit goods off our store shelves. And our bill will make sure that Customs fully collects the revenue due to the United States.

Enforcement of our trade laws must also be at the heart of our trade agenda. That's why I intend to pursue the Trade Enforcement Act that I introduced with Senators Hatch and Stabenow last year. That bill will strengthen our trade remedy laws. It will create a Senate-confirmed enforcement officer. And it will increase oversight of dispute settlement implementation.

Fair and firm enforcement includes a WTO-consistent approach to addressing misaligned currencies, like China's RMB. This Committee strongly endorsed such a bill last year.

And fair and firm enforcement also includes better intellectual property rights enforcement in our trade agreements. That will bolster our most innovative companies.

This year's trade agenda also promises the opportunity to implement policies that are both good economic policy and good foreign policy. This includes extending trade preference programs for the Caribbean. It includes extending the Generalized System of Preferences. And it also means reviewing trade sanctions toward countries that act against American interests, such as Burma and Iran.

We are also faced with the opportunity to consider free trade agreements pending before Congress. This administration has concluded free trade agreements with Colombia, Panama, and Korea. Each holds some promise. Each poses some obstacles. None are simple. And none face unanimous support. But each agreement has its potential for passage, when fairly handled and properly addressed.

Montana's mining boom in the mid 1800s yielded some of the world's greatest riches. Even today, Montana copper illuminates much of America, from Butte to Brooklyn. How brightly this year's trade achievements will shine is up to all of us.

There's just one way to find out. And that's to put our backs into it, and to keep digging. I hope Ambassador Schwab and my Colleagues will join me in this effort.

###