

United States Senate

Statement of Senator Jeff Bingaman
Oman Free Trade Agreement Hearing
International Trade Subcommittee

March 6, 2006



Ambassador Schwab, I want to thank you for appearing before the International Trade Subcommittee this afternoon. I look forward to hearing your testimony on the Oman Free Trade Agreement.

Ambassador, I am concerned that once again the Administration is missing an opportunity to improve the standards for workers by not including better text on labor. I understand that working conditions in Oman are improving, but there is still much more that needs to be done. It's my understanding that Congressman Rangel has been negotiating with Oman to encourage them to improve their labor standards. I support his efforts and hope that you will urge the government of Oman to resolve these matters before this agreement is brought to a vote in this Committee.

I also think we are missing an opportunity to make clear to members of the Arab League that their continuing boycott of Israel is unacceptable and will not be tolerated in any form by our trading partners. Instead of addressing this outside the text of the agreement on a case by case basis, we need to include clear language in all trade agreements with any current or former participant in the boycott that any continuance of the boycott will be in violation of the terms of the agreement and appropriate action will be taken. This is imperative if the Administration wants to seriously advance its Middle East Trade Initiative.

Finally, it has come to my attention that our government is considering pulling our funding out of North American Development Bank (NADB) – essentially shutting it down. As you know, NADB was created during negotiations on NAFTA to address environmental concerns along our border with Mexico. While I understand USTR does not have a role in the operation of NADB, you certainly have an interest in making sure that commitments made during trade agreements are respected. I will reserve judgment until I have been fully briefed on the issue, but let me assure you that any attempts by the Administration to not honor obligations made to members of Congress during trade negotiations will have an impact on the willingness of members of Congress to work with you on these agreements.