



Committee On Finance

Max Baucus, Ranking Member

NEWS RELEASE

<http://finance.senate.gov>

For Immediate Release
Tuesday, December 13, 2005

Contact: Carol Guthrie
202-224-4515

Statement of U.S. Senator Max Baucus on Senate Consideration of the United States-Bahrain Free Trade Agreement Implementation Act

Mr. President, today we begin debate of the free trade agreement between the United States and Bahrain.

This is an agreement that strengthens our ties with a stalwart ally in a troubled part of the world. It is an agreement with a leading reformer in the Middle East, and with the most open economy in the Arab world. And it is an agreement worthy of our support.

On the first day of enactment of the U.S.-Bahrain Free Trade Agreement, one hundred percent of trade in manufactured goods will be duty free, opening markets for U.S. exports of motor vehicles and parts, medical equipment, and refrigeration equipment. Agriculture exports are also expected to rise – and I hope Montana beef is among them.

The services chapter is the most robust of any agreement that the United States has negotiated. And Bahrain has promised American companies doing business in the Kingdom a regime free of barriers, modern in its regulation, and respectful of intellectual property rights.

For Bahrain, this agreement means greater integration into the world economy, a better environment for its workers, and a pioneering role in the Arab world. For the Middle East as a region, I hope this agreement is a firmly planted seed that will grow prosperity, openness, and stability.

A strong agreement like this one doesn't just happen. It takes hard work. It takes perseverance and follow-through. And it takes vision.

Fortunately, United States and Bahraini officials have these qualities in spades. I applaud their hard work.

Ambassador Belooshi of the Kingdom of Bahrain typifies the courageous action and progressive thinking the Bahrainis have shown through the FTA process, and we should applaud him for it.

-- 1 more --

I also applaud Ambassador Rob Portman and his predecessor, Robert Zoellick. Ambassador Zoellick negotiated a strong agreement, and Ambassador Portman saw it through. Ambassador Portman listened to Senators' interests in monitoring Bahrain's end to its boycott of Israel, and together we worked out a solution. He has been equally energetic and flexible in working with my colleagues in the House Ways and Means Committee to alleviate their concerns, especially on labor.

I also applaud the very capable and energetic staff of the United States Trade Representative. They are dedicated public servants, putting in long hours and endless effort into their work.

This is the first FTA to come before us since the very contentious Central American Free Trade Agreement. The overwhelming support I expect the Bahrain agreement to secure is a testament to what can be achieved when the Administration and the Congress work together to address concerns. The Bahrain FTA shows that when the Administration keeps an open dialogue with Congress, we can find common ground and achieve our common goals. I hope that we can continue to build upon the success of this FTA in helping to heal the wounds of previous battles.

I think we have before us a model for open dialogue, and for congressional support for trade liberalization. I hope that we can take this model and apply it to much larger trading partners and even bolder agreements – agreements that will open bigger markets, realize greater opportunities, and make our industries even more competitive.

Mr. President, I am pleased to support the U.S.-Bahrain free trade agreement. I urge my colleagues to pledge their support as well. Thank you.

###