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Opening Statement of Sen. Chuck Grassley
Committee on Finance Mark-up of the Jordan Free Trade Agreement

Thursday, July 26, 2001

We had an interesting mark-up last week. From the debate, it was clear that some members of the committee were concerned about the environmental and labor provisions in the Jordan Free Trade Agreement and the dispute settlement mechanism which would enforce these provisions.

I'm pleased to note that, since last week, there have been some developments on this issue. On July 23, the Administration and the Kingdom of Jordan exchanged letters which helped to clarify that neither party intends to apply these provisions in a manner that blocks trade. This is an important development. After all, the purpose of a free trade agreement is to facilitate trade. While the communication with Jordan may not resolve every senator's concern with the agreement, it is an important step forward.

Since last week, Senator Baucus and I talked several times about the Jordan Free Trade Agreement. From those conversations, I deeply appreciate how important it is for Chairman Baucus to have my support in moving the Jordan Agreement out of the Finance Committee soon. Furthermore, passing the Jordan Free Trade Agreement is an important foreign policy priority of the Bush Administration. And, its passage is important to our continued friendship with the Kingdom of Jordan. With those goals in mind, I will support moving Jordan to the floor today.

I do want to mention one other point. Last week's mark-up highlighted strong disappointment from some members over what was not on the agenda – Trade Promotion Authority. It is my strong desire to work with the chairman to craft a strong, bipartisan, meaningful TPA bill in the very near future. I was glad to see Senator Baucus put his concepts out for public discussion yesterday. A lot of Republicans won't like them, and the debate is well under way, but it's very important to have every legislative leader engaged in this debate.

Trade promotion authority is key to the President's ability to open new markets for American products and services, and it's the most effective way to increase profitability in agriculture as we begin debate on a new farm bill. I look forward to continuing our work on international trade issues, and hope we can achieve some real progress this year, particularly on passing Trade Promotion Authority.