



U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON

Finance

SENATOR CHUCK GRASSLEY, OF IOWA - CHAIRMAN

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Opening Statement of Chairman Chuck Grassley

Senate Finance Committee Markup of S. 1307: The Dominican Republic-Central America-United States Free Trade Agreement Implementation Act, and S.J. Res. 18: Approving the Renewal of Import Restrictions Contained in the Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act of 2003
Tuesday, June 28, 2005

Today we are meeting in executive session to consider two bills. First, we'll take up S. 1307, the Dominican Republic-Central America-United States Free Trade Agreement Implementation Act. Then, we'll consider Senate Joint Resolution 18, a joint resolution approving the renewal of import restrictions contained in the Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act of 2003.

Allow me to address each of these bills. S. 1307 helps level the playing field for U.S. farmers and workers by implementing the Dominican Republic-Central America-United States Free Trade Agreement. Today, most products from Central America and the Dominican Republic enter our market duty-free. In contrast, our exports to the region face a myriad of tariff and non-tariff barriers. S. 1307 eliminates these unfair trade barriers and allows us to compete fairly in a growing and vibrant market. Passage of the bill will also help solidify fragile democracies in a region of the world that, not so long ago, was ravaged with violent political conflict. In short, this bill is manifestly in our national security and economic interests. I hope members of the committee will join me to report the bill favorably.

The bill before us today is virtually identical to legislation that the Finance Committee recommended to the President on June 14. We've worked hard over the past several weeks to ensure that committee members and staff have had adequate opportunity to review the bill and the Statement of Administrative Action. Therefore, I won't go into detail on their provisions here. However, I'll note that the Administration chose not to include a recommendation by the Finance Committee that would have expanded the current Trade Adjustment Assistance Programs to service workers. Similarly, the Administration didn't include a recommendation by the House Ways and Means Committee, which would have required a report on the impact of the DR-CAFTA agreement on U.S. service workers. The Administration did include as part of S. 1307 a recommendation by the House Ways and Means Committee that calls for periodic reporting of labor standards in the region.

If time permits, we'll also take up Senate Joint Resolution 18, approving continued trade sanctions on Burma. As you may recall, the Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act was passed in May of 2003 in response to the Burmese government's reprehensible attack on the National League for Democracy, including the arrest of many NLD officials. The bill contains a number of sanctions on Burma, including an import ban. As part of the bill, Senator Baucus and I insisted on including provisions for continued congressional oversight. Specifically, the import ban will expire on the anniversary of enactment, which is July 28, unless Congress enacts a joint resolution extending the import ban for an additional year. Senate Joint Resolution 18 extends the import ban for another year. Unfortunately, the situation in Burma hasn't improved so I think extension of the ban is appropriate.

So, I urge my colleagues to vote with me to favorably report both S. 1307 and Senate Joint Resolution 18. If members have questions about either of these bills we have representatives from the administration and staff available to respond. Before I turn to Senator Baucus and the other members of the committee who wish to speak, I want to discuss process. We have a vote scheduled for 9:45 this morning on the energy bill. And at 10, the committee is scheduled to begin its hearing on Medicaid waste, fraud, and abuse. I want to ensure that each member of the committee has an opportunity to speak on DR-CAFTA if they want. The same goes for the Burma resolution. It may be unrealistic to expect we can finish up before today's session and vote these measures out. So, we're likely to continue today's executive session tomorrow morning at 9 a.m. for the purpose of finishing discussions and reporting these measures out of committee.