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BAUCUS TOURS PORT OF CARTAGENA TO DISCUSS CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT, COUNTERNARCOTICS EFFORTS

Visit Shed Light on Challenges Before America's Customs Agencies

Washington, DC – Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.) toured the Port of Cartagena, the busiest container port in Colombia, on Saturday and stressed the importance of effective customs enforcement and counternarcotics. Baucus met with representatives of Colombia's Anti-Narcotics Police (DIRAN) and the Sociedad Portuaria Regional de Cartagena (SPRC) to see firsthand the commercial and counternarcotics efforts at the port. In addition to his visit to the port, Baucus is meeting with Colombian government and business leaders to discuss trade issues, including the pending U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement.

"Trade between Colombia and the U.S. will grow once the Free Trade Agreement is approved, so we need to ensure the security, trade facilitation and customs enforcement priorities are addressed," said Baucus. **"We need to work hard to maintain a careful balance between trade and security that creates jobs and bolsters the economy while keeping Americans safe from harm. The better we work with other countries to balance trade and security, the more effective our own efforts will become."**

DIRAN is the law enforcement unit tasked with eradicating narcotics within Colombia's borders, and it works with the U.S. embassy's Narcotics Affairs Section and the SPRC to prevent drug trafficking through Colombian ports. In 2010, DIRAN port units seized more than 11 metric tons of cocaine, almost 15 kilos of heroin and 67 kilos of marijuana as part of the Port Security Program (PSP), a collaborative effort between the governments of Colombia and the U.S. and private industry.

In meetings with DIRAN and SPRC leaders, Baucus applauded the counternarcotics work that has removed a massive amount of drugs from the black market. He also highlighted the PSP program as a strong example of coordination between the U.S. and Colombia, and he asked how the U.S. can be of further help in the effort to ensure that no drugs are trafficked into the United States.

The Cartagena port is the busiest container port in Colombia. Fifty-two percent of all its container exports – which include coffee, nickel, tile and building materials, and textiles and apparel – go to the United States. Fifty nine percent of container imports – which include automobiles, chemicals, petrochemicals, appliances, machinery, and food products – come from the United States. With the signing of the U.S.-Colombia free trade agreement (FTA), trade between the United States and Colombia is expected to increase by \$1.5 billion.

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