

Statement of Senator Craig Thomas

Subcommittee on International Trade Bahrain – U.S. Free Trade Agreement Hearing October 6, 2005

A key to long-term U.S. economic growth is trade. Strong relationships create opportunities for business and entrepreneurs worldwide. It is estimated that 25% of U.S. economic growth in the 1990's was directly related to exports. Despite substantial growth in U.S. exports, Americans continue to import more than we send abroad.

It is critical that the United States continue to push to reduce global barriers to trade so U.S. companies can fairly compete. Entrepreneurs and businesses in the United States excel in innovation and creativity, and lack of access to markets prevents people from achieving their full potential. It also limits our ability to grow the economy and raise our standard of living. With nearly 96% of the world's consumers living outside the United States, we must find ways to open markets to U.S. goods and services.

In the long run, trade will only succeed if it is fair. Though Doha negotiations continue to move forward, reaching a comprehensive and fair agreement in the World Trade Organization remains a significant challenge and is taking much longer than planned.

We can't set trade negotiations aside while we wait for the world to come together in the WTO. The United States must continue to pursue bilateral agreements that will create long-term opportunities for America.

The United States must look to all regions where opportunities exist. The Middle East is an important area of the world and we need to continue to build relationships in the region, including establishing trading partnerships.

Bahrain and the United States isn't the largest trading partnership, but it is an important one, both strategically and economically. The proposed Free Trade Agreement builds on our relationship, expands access for U.S. goods, provides protections for intellectual property rights, and immediately eliminates tariffs on a wide-range of American agriculture products. It reinforces America's commitment to the Middle East, and provides a solid framework as more nations in the region seek to establish a trade relationship with the United States.