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Opening Statement of Senator Chuck Grassley
Hearing, “Growing Trade, Growing Vigilance: Import Health
and Safety Today and Tomorrow”
Thursday, October 18, 2007

American consumers derive great benefit from our open system of international trade. Lower prices. More choices. Year-round access to seasonal foods. Our markets allow us to choose from among the best products that the world has to offer. Last year, we consumed almost \$2 trillion in foreign goods. That number is expected to triple by 2015. As global economic integration increases, the challenges facing our government increase too. One of those challenges is before us today.

How do we ensure that imported products are safe for our consumers? There have been a number of stories in the news recently. Lead content in imported toys. Harmful chemicals in imported toothpaste and pet food. We may have one of the safest supply chains in the world, but we can't be complacent. We need to remain focused. And by “we” I mean not just our government agencies. Companies that import into the United States are responsible for any deficiencies in the safety of products they put on the market. We also need to make sure that foreign governments are doing their part as well.

Today's hearing provides an opportunity for the Committee to examine the current practices of our government regulators and businesses, as well as the practices of our trading partners to ensure the safety of products imported into the United States.

Earlier this year, the Administration created an interagency working group on import safety. The working group issued a framework for import safety that focuses on risk-based assessments targeting the life-cycles of individual products. The framework stresses prevention and increased communication among agencies. I look forward to reviewing more detailed recommendations from the working group when they become available later this year.

Information is key to both facilitating trade and ensuring import safety. Last year, the Finance Committee contributed significantly to the development and enactment of the Security and Accountability for Every Port Act of 2006. One of the elements we included was an authorization of the International Trade Data System as a principal element of the Automated Commercial Environment operated by U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

The Office of Management and Budget recently directed each participating federal agency to complete a plan for utilizing the International Trade Data System by 2009. Those plans are due by November 12th, and I look forward to reviewing the results as part of this Committee's jurisdictional oversight of these information systems.

Finally, I want to say a few words about our international trade obligations. I understand that some have claimed our trade agreements prevent us from adopting measures to protect the health of Americans. That's just flat-out wrong. There's nothing in our trade agreements that prevents us from determining our own level of protection for products sold in the United States. We set our own safety standards and no other country can force us to lower our standards. That's the reality. No one should be misled by such a false allegation.