



U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON

Finance

SENATOR CHUCK GRASSLEY, OF IOWA - CHAIRMAN

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Opening Statement of Sen. Chuck Grassley for the Nomination of
Robert J. Portman to be United States Trade Representative
Thursday, April 21, 2005

It is my pleasure to welcome Congressman Rob Portman to the committee today. Congress first mandated the appointment of a Special Representative for Trade Negotiations in 1962. Since that time, our trade representative has played a vital role in shaping much of our international economic policy. Today, it is an important position that requires a unique blend of technical and political skills for success. In that regard, we are fortunate to have Rob Portman as the President's nominee. Congressman Portman has a strong commitment to public service, having served the people of Ohio in the House of Representatives for the past twelve years. His thoughtful consideration of complex issues and determination to achieve sound public policy has made him an effective leader. He has played major roles in pension, tax, and IRS reform. He is well-known for his leadership in the fight against drug abuse. And, as a member of the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Trade, Congressman Portman has been intimately involved in a number of key international trade policy initiatives.

There is a long tradition of legislative and executive branch cooperation on international economic policy. The importance of working together became most evident following the passage of the Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act which helped plunge our economy into the Great Depression. In 1934 President Roosevelt recognized that high tariff barriers were strangling our economy. To spur economic growth, he sought and received legislative authority to negotiate reductions in tariff barriers. That bill, the Trade Agreements Act, embodied the basic partnership between the legislative and executive branches of government that we know today as Trade Promotion Authority. It is a partnership that has served this nation well for the better part of the last century, and hopefully will continue to do so for the next.

But the battle for economic freedom is far from over. We cannot afford to return to the tyranny of tariffs embodied by Smoot-Hawley. Decisions we make in the near future on economic policy will have a significant impact on generations to come. They are decisions we cannot take lightly. Strong leadership at the Office of the United States Trade Representative is key. Congress will soon be considering free trade agreements with Central America, the Dominican Republic and Bahrain. We also have a number of important bilateral and regional negotiations under way that will bring significant benefits to the U.S. economy. And, perhaps most important, are ongoing negotiations at the World Trade Organization. Successfully concluding these negotiations and ensuring their implementation will take a skilled champion of America's interests. I am confident that Rob Portman will effectively fill that role. There is strong interest in moving the nomination quickly. There are a number of important events coming up over the next few weeks including a meeting of the World Trade Organization ministers in early May. I would certainly like to see you confirmed by the Senate before that time.

