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Opening Statement of Senator Chuck Grassley
Senate Finance Committee Executive Session
Wednesday, June 18, 2008

First, I want to begin by acknowledging the strong leadership of Senator Smith in addressing the imperative to get tougher with respect to Iran's nuclear ambitions. Senator Smith introduced the Iran Counter-Proliferation Act of 2007 over one year ago. The Committee held a hearing on that bill two months ago. Today's markup is a direct outgrowth of those efforts. While I did have some trade concerns with the way Senator Smith's bill was drafted, I'm pleased that working together with the Chairman and with Senator Smith, we've been able to resolve my concerns. The Chairman's modification places a strong bill before the Committee. Some of the elements of this bill fall outside the jurisdiction of the Finance Committee. I encourage my colleagues to avoid delving into those provisions that are not within our jurisdiction at this markup. Any reconsideration of those provisions is better left to subsequent floor consideration of this important legislation.

Second, I'm pleased to see the Finance Committee take up the nomination of Deanna Tanner Okun to be Deputy United States Trade Representative. Commissioner Okun is eminently qualified for this position, and I regret that it's taken so long for us to act on her nomination. Our hearing on her nomination raised some questions about whether section 141(b)(3) of the Trade Act of 1974 serves as an impediment to her nomination. In order to address such concerns, I decided to introduce a joint resolution to waive application of this statutory provision to Commissioner Okun's nomination. That resolution is also before the Committee today for a vote. I hope to see the resolution enacted and the nomination confirmed as soon as possible. That's what we did in 1997, in a bipartisan way, when a similar issue arose in connection with the nomination of Charlene Barshefsky to be the United States Trade Representative. I urge my colleagues to support Senate Joint Resolution 38 in addition to Commissioner Okun's nomination.

Finally, I want to note my strong support for the other nominees we plan to report out of the Finance Committee today. All of them have strong backgrounds that will make them assets to our nation as they hopefully start in their new jobs in the near future. Once again, I want to express my admiration of, and gratitude for, Elizabeth Paris, who has been nominated to be a judge on the U.S. Tax Court. Her service to the Senate has been invaluable, and my regret that she will no longer be a member of my staff is tempered by the knowledge that she will be an ideal member of the U.S. Tax Court. I hope my colleagues will join me in supporting Elizabeth's nomination as well as the other nominations before the Committee today.

