CONGRESSMAN SHERWOOD BOEHLERT (R-NY)
STATEMENT ON THE COSTELLO AMENDMENT TO H.R. 50
May 17, 2005

I know the gentleman's amendment is well intentioned. And none of us would argue with its ostensible purpose – to keep and create jobs in the U.S. I always say that "jobs" is my favorite four-letter word.

But here's the problem with the amendment. In many ways, it runs afoul of our international trade obligations. Specifically, we have signed treaties in which we and the other signatories agree not to limit most government procurements. And guess why we do that? We do it because we think it will help keep and create jobs in the U.S. by enabling U.S. companies to compete for government contracts abroad. There's no way to know for sure, but it's perfectly likely that this amendment would actually cost jobs in the U.S. by preventing U.S. companies from winning procurement contracts overseas.

Moreover, this amendment is at odds with our international obligations and possibly endangers American jobs even though no one can point to a particular problem that this amendment is designed to resolve. Is there any indication that NOAA has been loose with the taxpayers money by heedlessly sending money overseas? No.

This amendment is a well meaning, symbolic expression of the concern we all have with outsourcing, but it's not designed to combat a specific, known problem. But it would create specific, known problems by conflicting with trade agreements. And I would add that the Administration strenuously objects for that same reason.

So, I will offer a second-degree amendment that says that the Costello language cannot override an international obligation of the United States.

I imagine Mr. Costello will claim that this would “gut” the amendment. If that is so, then it just confirms that Mr. Costello’s language will create an international trade incident, which may hurt the U.S. If my language will not “gut” Mr. Costello’s effort, then there’s no reason not to pass it.

So I urge passage of my amendment, which will balance Mr. Costello’s good intentions with our obligation to ensure that the U.S. abides by its international commitments.