

Heard on the Hill  
Roll Call  
July 28, 2008

If the Shoe Fits. Rep. Earl Blumenauer is known for loving bicycles and bow ties. While he probably couldn't give the gals of "Sex and the City" a run for their money, the Oregon Democrat apparently also harbors a love for shoes.

Or more specifically, a hatred of the tariffs placed on imported shoes. Sporting a pair of comfy-looking brown loafers, Blumenauer spoke at the Cato Institute on Friday in support of the Affordable Footwear Act, which would eliminate tariffs placed on certain imported shoes.

Current tariff regulations make little sense, Blumenauer said. According to statistics, shoes and other articles of clothing make up only 5 percent of America's imports, but account for half of the income from tariffs.

And the tariffs placed on shoes in particular vary widely, Blumenauer said.

For example, Oregon-based Columbia Sportswear imports its popular "Diamond Peak Boot." The tariff placed on the men's version of the boot is 15 percent higher than the women's version, Blumenauer said, joking that this could even be called gender discrimination.

But William Hawkins, who works at the U.S. Business and Industry Council, said removing the tariffs wouldn't actually benefit footwear-loving Americans. Hawkins sees a communist conspiracy at work, since the tariffs most hinder China — the nation that provides the United States with most of its shoes.

With China under a money crunch, facing high-energy costs and rising wages, the country is looking to save cash, Hawkins said.

"Bills like this don't get written because a bunch of barefoot peasants wandered up to Capitol Hill," he said. "This is the China lobby who's pushing this."

Apparently, red shoes are so in this season.