

CAFTA: A Flawed Trade Pact

By Catherine Gordon

April 11, 2005: Urge your senators and representatives to oppose the Central American Free Trade Agreement

During the 109th Congress, which began in January, the House and Senate are expected to vote on the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA)-a proposed pact between the United States and five Central American countries (Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica). The Bush Administration signed CAFTA on May 28, 2004, and congressional approval is now the final hurdle before its passage into law.

The agreement is deeply flawed, and would likely have a devastating effect on both workers and the environment. As Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch argues, the passage of CAFTA "would serve to push ahead the corporate globalization model that has caused the 'race to the bottom' in labor and environmental standards and would promote privatization and deregulation of key public services." Indeed, many nonprofit groups involved in Central America contend that the pact, while delivering substantial profits to multinational corporations, would do very little for the poor of that region.

Fortunately, as John Nichols points out in a recent article in *The Nation*, the fight against CAFTA has the makings for success. Evidence from the 2004 election-including the defeat of Republican congressional candidate Billy Tauzin III in Louisiana and the reelection of Democratic Senator Russ Feingold in Wisconsin-suggests that the free trade issue is problematic for Republicans on Capitol Hill. "Concerns about record trade deficits," Nichols writes, "as well as complaints from constituents who worry that their jobs will be the next to go, have weakened the traditional GOP faith that free trade is an economic cure-all."

Understanding the realities of a trade agreement like CAFTA, organizations from the AFL-CIO to the Sierra Club have been working tirelessly to block its approval in Congress. This impressively broad coalition has set the stage for a serious fight, and its efforts are worthy of support.

The future of US trade policy in the Americas rests largely on the actions of Congress in the coming months. Contact your senators and representatives and urge them to take a firm stand against CAFTA.

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Sample Letter

As a constituent, I am writing to encourage you to oppose the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA).

At some point during this legislative session, you will likely have the opportunity to cast a vote on CAFTA. The Bush Administration signed the pact in

May 2004 and congressional approval is now the final hurdle before its passage into law.

If passed, CAFTA would have devastating effects on labor and environmental standards throughout Central America and beyond. I do not see how the pact would benefit the poor people of Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica-as argued by its proponents-and I find it troublesome that multinational corporations, as opposed to their workers, stand to gain the most from its passage. Furthermore, I fear that CAFTA's passage could also have a negative impact on workers in the United States.

The future of US trade policy in the Americas rests largely on the actions of Congress in the coming months. I urge you take a stand in this critical debate and oppose CAFTA.