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At Long Last, Bush Sends CAFTA to Congress; Desperate Attempt to Push Through Massively Unpopular Treaty, With or Without the Votes; Global Exchange Calls on Citizens to Voice Their Opposition

WASHINGTON, June 24 (AScribe Newswire) -- In a long awaited move, the Bush Administration finally sent the Central America - Dominican Republic - United States Free Trade Agreement (DR-CAFTA) to Congress for approval. With Fast Track in place, a vote could come as early as next week.

In response, Global Exchange, an international human rights organization, called on citizens across the country to make their voices heard with their elected officials in opposition to CAFTA. "Corporate lobbyists are spending millions of dollars to buy votes in Congress. But they still don't have the votes, because millions of real-life working Americans have been devastated by the NAFTA model of 'free trade.' Americans have stopped blindly following the trail of broken promises and false myths of corporate globalization. We want to build a different path of regional integration and real development with our Central American neighbors," said Deborah James, Global Economy Director of Global Exchange.

In the 11 years since the passage of NAFTA, over 800,000 U.S. workers have lost their jobs as factories have moved south in search of cheap labor and un-enforced environmental and labor laws. In Mexico, manufacturing wages have plunged by 20 percent since NAFTA came into effect. Over 1.5 million Mexican farmers have been squeezed off their land as low-priced U.S. taxpayer subsidized corn overwhelmed their native corn markets. As a result, the number of farmers who have left their communities and headed north in an effort to find an income feed their families has skyrocketed. Meanwhile, in the U.S., some 38,000 family-owned farms have closed, while agri-business profits have tripled.

The devastating effects of NAFTA have led many in Congress to question the "free-trade" model. In the House, numerous Republicans have joined the vast majority of Democrats in opposing CAFTA. The Hispanic Caucus voted 14-1 in opposition, and historically pro-free trade Democrats have joined the opposition. Many estimates range that Bush is between 30-40 votes shy of passing CAFTA.

May 28 marked the one-year anniversary of the signing of CAFTA. Trade agreements are usually ratified within 3 months, but CAFTA has faced stiff opposition on both sides of the aisle. Now the Bush Administration is lobbying hard for what it considers to be the most important trade item on the agenda this year. "As support for the occupation of Iraq plummets, and Republican efforts to privatize social security flounders, Bush is hurting for a policy win - but he can't do it on the backs of Central American and U.S. farmers and workers," said James.

"Everyone thought the Republicans wouldn't send CAFTA to the floor until they had the votes. But CAFTA just cannot pass on the merits. So Bush seems to be resorting to good old pork barrel politics to buy votes," said James. But a report released by Public Citizen last week showed that 89 percent of 64 policy promises made for past trade votes were broken, and two third of pork barrels remained empty. "It seems that the Bush Administration's only hope of passing CAFTA is through false promises, political pressure, and a failed ideology, rather than the record of the model's impact on real-life Americans."

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NOTE TO EDITORS: Global Exchange experts on CAFTA are available for interviews in English or Spanish.

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