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Bush and Business Elite Push New NAFTA

John Kerry has vowed to renegotiate the Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA). While the Bush Administration appears posed to force the issue during a lame duck session in November, numerous Los Angeles Congressional Representatives refuse to take a clear position.

“CAFTA is an opportunity for Democrats to draw a clear distinction between themselves and the Administration. Will we repeat failures of the past, or forge ahead with a democratic and balanced approach to international trade?” asks Joe Radisich of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union Southern California District Council at a news conference being held downtown today with Los Angeles elected officials, labor unions and immigrant rights organizations. The groups express their opposition to CAFTA from 12:00-12:30pm, directly across the street from the Hyatt Regency Hotel (711 S. Hope St.) where the U.S. Chamber of Commerce hosts a pro-CAFTA gala featuring Antonio Saca, the President of El Salvador.

“Free trade pacts like CAFTA set policy far beyond what most Americans would consider trade,” warned L.A. City Councilman Garcetti. “New rules in CAFTA threaten state and local official’s ability to act in the best interest of our constituents. So-called “barriers” to trade are often the rights of our citizens to form unions, support local business, and drink clear water. I strongly support trade, but the price for CAFTA is far too high.”

“Ten years of NAFTA has proven a complete failure for workers and the L.A.. economy, destroying 30,000 manufacturing jobs here in L.A. and more than 200,000 jobs statewide,” said Miguel Contreras, Executive Secretary-Treasurer of the L.A. County Federation of Labor. “A vote for CAFTA shows contempt for working people and their families. Clearly we must forge ahead with a new approach to international trade.”

“CAFTA simply repeats past failures,” asserts Angela Sanbrano, Executive Director of the Central American Resource Center (CARECEN). CARECEN, the nations largest Central America community center, dedicates itself to defending the civil and human rights of Los Angeles’ Central American community. “These agreements are negotiated in secret, undermine democratic decision making processes, and have failed to produce real economic development for working people in the U.S. and Latin American. Enough is enough!”

“Free trade is anti-development, period,” comments Felipe Aguirre, legal coordinator for Comité Pro-Uno, a local economic justice and Latino rights organization. “NAFTA has created millions of economic refugees -- hard-working Mexicans forced to leave their loved ones in search of opportunity here in the U.S. The Bush Administration’s proposed CAFTA will do the same to Central America. We must promote a balanced approach to trade that will mutually benefit communities in the U.S. and abroad.”

This event is sponsored by the California Coalition for Fair Trade and Human Rights, and endorsed by The Los Angeles County Federation of Labor, Central American Resource Center (CARECEN), ILWU Southern California District Council, SEIU local 660, Comité Pro-Uno, SweatShop Watch, CISPES, and the National Labor Council for Latin American Advancement (LCLAA).