

Citizens Trade Campaign

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Central America Trade Agreement to Be Signed Today – Dead on Arrival

WASHINGTON – Trade ministers will sign the “Central America Free Trade Agreement” (CAFTA) today at the Organization of America States despite the lack of momentum for the agreement in the U.S. Congress. In announcing the signing two weeks ago, the office of the U.S. Trade Representative made no mention of the agreement’s prospects for passage this year. Law-makers in Washington have increasingly criticized CAFTA over a variety concerns including its lack of enforceable labor protections, the potential negative impact the agreement could have on the environment, and CAFTA’s replication of the notorious investor to state cases that have allowed corporations to sue governments under NAFTA.

Recent speculation in Congressional offices indicates that members of Congress do not expect CAFTA to be voted on this year. Widespread opposition to the harmful “offshoring” of jobs has also contributed to sentiment against the agreement which would include Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and the Dominican Republic as well as the U.S.

“The trade ministers can sign CAFTA, but it will be dead on arrival in Congress,” said Larry Weiss, Executive Director of Citizens Trade Campaign. **“Coupled with the stalled WTO and FTAA talks, it is one more indication that the Bush Administration's misguided trade policy is in a state of collapse.”**

“NAFTA has created serious environmental problems - rather than alleviating them - accelerating the destruction of natural resources and opening the way for corporations to challenge environmental and health standards in unaccountable international tribunals,” said Brent Blackwelder, President of Friends of the Earth. **“Trade ministers ought to be fixing the outrages in NAFTA instead of pushing more of the same in agreements like CAFTA.”**

“CAFTA is neither fair nor equitable,” said Dena Hoff, Montana family farmer and Trade Task Force Chair of the National Family Farm Coalition. **“It dismantles the right of each country's people to decide their own internal food and agricultural policies and threatens their access to seeds and patents. A fair trade agreement would promote food sovereignty, not destroy it.”**

“CAFTA is a step backwards on protecting labor rights in trade agreements – it is clear that there will be no effective enforcement in the agreement as it currently stands,” said Bill Klinefelter, Legislative and Political Director of the United Steelworkers of America. **“The Administration’s backsliding on its duty to workers in the U.S. and abroad has led to tremendous opposition to this agreement in Congress, and will ultimately derail it.”**

The Citizens Trade Campaign (CTC) is a national coalition of environmental, labor, consumer, family farm, religious, and other civil society groups founded in 1992 during the fight over the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). CTC members include Alliance for Sustainable Jobs and the Environment; Americans for Democratic Action; Communications Workers of America; Defenders of Wildlife; Friends of the Earth; Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy; International Brotherhood of Teamsters; the National Family Farm Coalition; Public Citizen; UNITE!; United Methodist Church General Board of Church and Society; the United Steelworkers of America; United Students Against Sweatshops; and Western Organization of Resource Councils, as well as regional, state, and city-based coalitions, organizations, and individual activists throughout the United States.

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