

Press Release

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SCHAKOWSKY VOTES AGAINST FLAWED CAFTA AGREEMENT

SAYS AGREEMENT WOULD ELIMINATE U.S. JOBS, EXPLOIT WORKERS, AND HARM THE ENVIRONMENT

WASHINGTON, DC - U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky, ranking member on the Subcommittee on Commerce, Trade, and Consumer Protection, today delivered a statement in the House of Representatives expressing her opposition to the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA). Representative Schakowsky opposed the agreement on the grounds that it would eliminate U.S. jobs, would require inadequate labor and environmental protections, and would lead to the exploitation of Central American and Dominican workers.

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Representative Schakowsky's statement is below:

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"Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong opposition to the Dominican Republic-Central America-United States Free Trade Agreement Implementation Act (DR-CAFTA or CAFTA). This trade agreement will eliminate thousands of American jobs without raising the quality of life for Central Americans and Dominicans. It is an agreement written to raise profits for multinational corporations at the expense of workers and the

environment in the U.S. and the CAFTA countries. CAFTA should be renegotiated or voted down."

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"There is wide, bipartisan opposition to this bill here in the Congress because it endangers workers and jobs in the U.S. and abroad, it endangers our economy and it endangers the environment. Opposition to Congressional ratification of this flawed agreement also runs deep outside of the Congress, throughout this country and the other signatory nations. The public as well as labor leaders, environmentalists, economists, and business owners and the clergy all strongly oppose the measure. Hundreds of thousands of Central Americans have taken to the streets to protest CAFTA."

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"I strongly support increased global trade for the United States. However, when negotiated, I believe free trade agreements should place human and labor rights and the protection of the environment on an equal par with the rights of capital. While CAFTA provides extensive protections for goods and capital, it provides no new protections for workers or the environment, and allows the signatory nations to do nothing more than enforce their own laws on labor and the environment."

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"Implementation of CAFTA would further the failed experiment that was NAFTA. As a result of NAFTA, my home state of Illinois has suffered the loss of over 100,000 jobs. The nation has lost almost 1 million jobs due to the displacement of production that supported them prior to the implementation of NAFTA. Free trade agreements like NAFTA and PNTR for China perpetuate the race to the bottom in the global economy. They lower working and living standards for workers in other countries and kill jobs in the United States. CAFTA's effects would be no different."

"The labor provisions in CAFTA are intentionally unenforceable. Violations of core labor standards cannot be taken to dispute resolution. The commitment to enforce domestic labor laws is subject to remedies weaker than those available for commercial disputes. This violates the negotiating objective of current U.S. trade law that equivalent remedies should exist for all parts of an agreement. Further, the 'enforce your own laws' standard allows countries the opportunity to rewrite and weaken their labor laws to attract investment."

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"Instead of pursuing policies that undermine the rights and security of U.S. workers and workers in other countries, the United States should lead the world by example through a trade policy that improves the lives of individuals and does not just add to the profits of major corporations. Our policies should benefit workers here in this country, create and sustain jobs and help our small and medium-sized and family-owned businesses grow. CAFTA will not accomplish those goals nor will it offer better opportunities to the people of Central America and the Dominican Republic."

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"The abysmal working conditions in Mexico should serve as a sign of what CAFTA will bring to Central America and the Dominican Republic. The Mexican middle class that was supposed to arise as a result of NAFTA is missing. I visited Ciudad Juarez on the tenth anniversary of NAFTA. Instead of finding a thriving Mexican middle class, I found workers living in the packing crates of the products that they were manufacturing. The poverty rates and disparities in wealth in Mexico have actually grown since NAFTA. CAFTA would just spread those conditions further south by offering multinational corporations new opportunities to profit off the backs of low-wage workers."

"I dispute the attempts by free trade proponents to reduce the debate to a choice between 'free trade' and 'no trade', 'this agreement' or 'no agreement.' We can do better. We can achieve our economic objectives and moral responsibilities through responsible trade. And we can and should go back to the drawing board and fix CAFTA if we want to protect workers and the environment and give the people of the DR-CAFTA countries the chance for a better future. I urge my colleagues to vote no on CAFTA so that we can renegotiate this flawed trade agreement."