

US Should Not Spread "Failed" NAFTA Through Americas - US Lawmakers

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A group of US lawmakers on Wednesday opposed spreading NAFTA's free trade model through the hemisphere, saying that free trade between Mexico, Canada and the United States has led to social upheaval, increased poverty and downwardly spiraling wages.

The lawmakers, fresh from a a visit to the US-Mexico border, said that using the North American Free Trade Agreement as a template for the planned Free Trade Area of the America could yield similarly negative results.

"It would be a tremendous mistake - not only for this country, but for the world - to go headlong into expanded trade agreements without looking at the consequences and the history of the one we already have," said Representative Raul Grijalva, a Democrat from Arizona, at a press conference.

Talks were set to begin in Miami this week on creating a pan-American free trade zone, nearly ten years after Congress approved the NAFTA.

"In a time when trade deficits are soaring and job losses are mounting, nine million Americans are already out of work ... the Bush administration is in Miami working to expand the failed NAFTA model to 31 more countries in a Free Trade Area of the Americas," said Representative Marcy Kaptur said.

A half dozen lawmakers spent four days talking to Mexican factory workers, union organizers and social service providers in Juarez, Mexico City and Puebla as well as Tlaxcala, two hours east of the Mexican capital, where they met with farmers.

Vermont representative Bernie Sanders called NAFTA "a disaster for the people of Mexico," while Representative Jan Schakowsky of Illinois said her visit to the United States' southern neighbor "put a human face ... on this notion of a race to the bottom."

Business and labor interests have quarreled over the legacy of NAFTA, with organized labor saying that the trade pact has cost hundreds of thousands of US jobs and benefited the only corporate sector.

Free trade advocates, meanwhile, credit the dismantling of trade protections between Canada,

Mexico and the United States with what they said has been increased manufacturing investment and revitalized economic growth across North America.