

Congressman John B. Larson Opposes CAFTA Without Better Labor Protections

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: June 15, 2005

Congressman John B. Larson Opposes CAFTA Without Better Labor Protections

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Congressman John B. Larson voted against the U.S. Central American Free Trade Agreement Wednesday when the House Ways and Means Committee took up the bill.

In a preliminary vote, the Committee endorsed the White-House negotiated treaty unchanged 25 to 16.

Larson objected to the trade agreement as drafted because it strikes an unfair balance, offering little to stimulate the American economy.

He said the pact falls short of the standards that any trade agreement America signs onto should meet: the broad fulfillment of America 's economic interests, the opening of fair markets for America 's goods and services and the reversal of America 's ever-growing trade deficit.

"Whoever the winners, they're not the American or the Central American worker," Larson said. "I support free – and fair – trade, but that isn't what CAFTA will accomplish.

"Jobs are America 's fastest-growing export," he added. "We should be exporting our values and market goods not our jobs. As the world's richest nation, we have a moral obligation to lift the standard of living of the world's poor. It is double-speak for the President to say he wants to promote democracy to the south of our borders but pushes a trade agreement that consigns subsistence workers to economic bondage."

Larson co-sponsored an amendment offered by 13 of the 17 Democrats on the committee that would have required the agreement to set specific labor standards consistent with the International Labor Organization and would have subjected violations to the same dispute settlement mechanisms as other commercial provisions within it.

The Committee defeated the amendment 17 to 24.

"This trade agreement is a step backward instead of a step forward," Larson said. "I cannot understand this Administration's obstinance to accept a reasonable request that the Central American countries have no problem with. As written, this pact continues the assault on working people here in America and around the world."

In related events, the Bush Administration has proposed a substantial cut in U.S. funding to the International Labor Organization, part of the United Nations which established international labor standards and which verifies that these standards are met. Funding by the United States makes up a large portion of the ILO's budget.

###