

# Asheville Citizen-Times

**For an issue as important as CAFTA, Taylor should have made sure his vote counted**

August 2, 2005

First, it should be said that even if Rep. Charles Taylor's vote had been recorded on the Central American Free Trade Agreement it would not have changed the outcome.

The vote was 217-215 for the agreement. A "no" vote from Taylor would have narrowed the margin to one vote, but would not have killed the controversial free-trade bill, which has already been passed by the Senate and which the president has said he will sign.

Nonetheless, Taylor, a Brevard Republican, had made a point of defying the White House and Republican House leadership on the legislation, insisting that he would vote against it.

"I have voted against all of these trade pacts and will vote against CAFTA because although CAFTA isn't as bad as NAFTA it still, like all the trade pacts, fails to provide and monitor a system of symbiotic trade relations, i.e. guaranteed equal trade rather than just dumping goods, either legally or illegally, on our businesses in this country," Taylor said in a press release.

But on Thursday, when the bill passed the U.S. House, no vote by Taylor was recorded. In a press release later that day, Taylor said an electronic voting problem prevented his vote against the measure from registering. Given his stated opposition and the importance of the issue to Western North Carolina,

where thousands of jobs have been lost over the past few years as a result of outsourcing or overseas competition, the congressman's failure to successfully cast a vote against CAFTA has raised some questions.

Why, for instance, did he agree to a request from the House leadership to wait until the end of the time originally allotted for voting to cast his vote? How often do "glitches" like this occur? And why did he fail to make certain his vote had been registered?

After voting, Taylor apparently left the chambers with Rep. Howard Coble, also a North Carolina Republican who opposed CAFTA, for an Appropriations Committee office. Ed McDonald, Coble's chief of staff, said the two men were watching C-SPAN on a closed circuit feed, but did not have the volume turned on. McDonald said he also watched the vote unfold on television and when he heard commentators say that Taylor had not voted, he tried to call Taylor's office twice, but got no answer.

Taylor also has a pager that notifies him about votes, but he said he wasn't paged about the CAFTA vote. Why?

The incident may well have marked the unofficial kickoff of the 2006 11th District congressional campaign. Swain County Democrat Heath Shuler, who has announced he will seek the Democratic nomination for the seat, said Taylor

“gave us his word that he would vote against CAFTA, and I don’t understand why he did not.”

That means Taylor will likely face more questions about his vote on CAFTA. The implication from some quarters is that Taylor succumbed to leadership pressure and simply didn’t vote.

“I think after seven terms in Congress, especially on such a crucial vote, one would hope Congressman Charles Taylor might be able to figure out the many ways to vote, and I think his story might be unraveling,” said Schorr Johnson, with the North Carolina Democratic Party.

Early on, Taylor said “the clerk’s computer logs verified that I had

attempted to vote, but did not show my ‘nay.’”

If the congressman can demonstrate that he attempted to vote, he would be well advised to do so. He would also be well-advised to attempt to find out what caused the problems, both with his vote and with his pager.

If this is a regular mishap with congressional voting, how many other bills have been affected? If it’s not a regular occurrence, but a strange glitch, how did it happen and is it likely to happen again?

The answers to these questions will not only provide Taylor with a response to the charge that he betrayed his constituents, they might fix a problem before it affects votes on other bills.

<http://www.citizentimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20050802/OPINION01/50801009&SearchID=73216644850606>