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Narrow Senate passage of CAFTA spells trouble for anti-environmental trade agreement

Environmental community launches intense push to defeat trade bill on House floor

WASHINGTON DC—Following Senate passage of the Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) by one of the closest margins of any trade vote in recent Senate history (54 in favor, 45 against), national environmental groups representing millions of members pledged an intensive campaign to defeat CAFTA in the House of Representatives.

"This close vote is a clear signal that the American people are tired of bad trade agreements that hurt our communities and environment," said Carl Pope, Executive Director of the Sierra Club. "CAFTA fails a test every trade agreement should pass -- it fails to provide effective and meaningful protections for the environment in the U.S. and around the world. Defeating CAFTA is a top priority for the Sierra Club and we will keep up the pressure right up to the vote."

During the upcoming Congressional recess, environmental groups will activate thousands of activists and concerned citizens to contact their representatives and urge them to speak out against the destructive trade bill.

The proposed CAFTA would repeat the mistakes of NAFTA and other trade agreements by expanding the privileges of international business at the expense of working families and the environment. Like NAFTA, CAFTA expands the ability of multinational corporations to attack legitimate environmental and public health measures in secret trade tribunals if they interfere with profits.

"CAFTA is a step in the wrong direction for the environment and public health," said Deb Callahan, President of the League of Conservation Voters. "We urge the House of Representatives to oppose it when it comes to a vote."

Trade agreements must advance safeguards for air, water, land and wildlife and this one doesn't," said Larry Schweiger, President of National Wildlife Federation. "Adequate funding for poor countries is needed to achieve these safeguards and CAFTA lacks any such commitment."

"We want trade agreements that open new markets while raising environmental standards and safeguarding our precious natural resources. Unfortunately, CAFTA puts special interests before the public interest, and we will be fighting to ensure that the House defeats it," said Brent Blackwelder, President of Friends of the Earth.

"Trade should lift environmental standards, but CAFTA's special rules for foreign investors will weaken environmental laws in Central America and here at home," said Buck Parker, Executive Director of Earthjustice.

"Our members are deeply concerned about the impact that CAFTA would have on wildlife habitat in Central America, which is home to some of the world's most beautiful and rare plants and animals," said Rodger Schlickeisen, President of Defenders of Wildlife.

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