

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Last Thursday, July 14, 2005, Rep. Xavier Becerra (CA-31), the only Southern Californian who serves on the House Committee on Ways and Means, joined his colleagues, Reps. Charlie Rangel (NY-15), the ranking member of the Ways and Means Committee; Ben Cardin (MD-3), the ranking member of the Subcommittee on Trade; and Sandy Levin (MI-12) on a letter sent to President Bush encouraging him to renegotiate the Dominican Republic-Central America Free Trade Agreement.

With the House of Representatives poised to consider the DR-CAFTA during the week of July 25, opposition to this flawed agreement continues to remain firm with the Republican leadership struggling to muster the 218 votes needed to ratify it.

Rep. Becerra, who acknowledges the importance of trade with the region, has been a vocal opponent of the DR-CAFTA over the past year continuously citing the agreement's sub-par labor standards that encourage the signatory countries to simply "enforce your own laws" rather than adhere to the internationally-recognized core labor standards as outlined by the International Labor Organization and ensure the prohibition of the worst forms of child labor, discrimination, and forced labor; and recognize the rights of association and collective bargaining. And because the current DR-CAFTA fails to recognize these core standards, the agreement misses an opportunity to meaningfully elevate the quality of life, as well as the economies of our neighbors in Central America and the Dominican Republic, and instead sets us on a course towards the lowest common denominator and competition at the margins.

It was in this spirit and for these reasons that Rep. Becerra and his colleagues submitted their letter to President Bush. "Consequently, the standard adopted in CAFTA of 'enforce your own laws' would serve only to lock in a status quo with harsh conditions, indeed allowing bad laws to become even worse," the letter stated as it then went on to detail an incident where 34 workers

at the Acajutla Port in El Salvador were illegally fired for simply trying to form a union.

The letter further states that the agreement embodies a double standard when one juxtaposes the labor provisions with those for intellectual property – arguably considered by many to be some of the best provisions ever negotiated. “We would never allow a country with a history of violating intellectual property rights to adhere to an ‘enforce you own law’ standard,” the four members wrote, begging the question as to why the administration feels our friends and neighbors to the south do not deserve the same rock-solid guarantees that are being given to computer software and DVDs.

“A CAFTA that does not seek to address these issues is bad for individual workers in Central America, wrong for Central American nations desperately in need of a growing middle class, and unfair to both U.S. workers who should not compete with workers who are suppressed and to U.S. businesses in need of markets ... We continue to stand ready to work with your Administration to craft the type of CAFTA that will help re-establish the broad bi-partisan coalition for international trade that the challenges of globalization demand and this nation deserves.”

The full text of the letter sent to the president is available to read by [clicking here](#) .

### Becerra.house.gov ###