

WASHINGTON, D.C. – With the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) due to be signed this Friday, May 29, by the United States, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic, Representative Xavier Becerra (CA – 31), the only congressional member from Southern California on the House Ways and Means Committee and the Subcommittee on Trade, issued the following statement:

“The Central American countries along with the Dominican Republic and the United States have made great strides in recent years as much closer and integrated collaborating democracies. The exchange of commerce, ideals, and people are at the core of this cooperative and constructive relationship. A trade agreement with the Central American countries and the Dominican Republic would provide an excellent opportunity to advance further the integration and partnership in a more structured and concrete manner.

“In a May 15, 2003, letter to U.S. Trade Representative Robert Zoellick, members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus raised concerns with where the Administration was heading in its negotiations of the Central American Free Trade Agreement. We encouraged Ambassador Zoellick to negotiate a CAFTA that would create new opportunities for workers, businesses and farmers in all our countries, would help break the cycle of poverty in the region, and serve as a model for hemispheric trade. We also urged him to negotiate an agreement that included meaningful labor and environmental obligations, including a fully enforceable commitment by CAFTA countries to adopt and effectively enforce internationally-recognized core labor standards. I am disappointed that the agreement, as negotiated, fails in that regard, and provides only that the parties enforce their own labor laws.

“The current CAFTA, as negotiated, would be a step backwards. I understand that due to the Administration’s accurate assessment that implementing legislation for the CAFTA, as

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negotiated, cannot pass Congress this year, it will not be submitted to Congress until sometime next year. The Administration should take advantage of the opportunity presented by these next several months to ensure that the CAFTA contains adequate labor and environmental provisions and lifts up workers and businesses in all of our countries. As always, I stand prepared to work with Ambassador Zoellick to achieve these basic and essential goals.

“I strongly state my support for a CAFTA, but not this CAFTA.”

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