



SHARE Foundation

Building a New El Salvador Today!

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Congressional Lobby Kit To

Stop Cafta

INCLUDING:

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I. DIFFERING FORMS OF CONGRESSIONAL PRESSURE

Congressional pressure will play a critical role in whether or not we defeat CAFTA. Sometimes, all that is needed to convince a Representative to take a stand is to ask (subtly demand) that s/he do so; at other times we must force him/her to do so through grassroots political pressure. In this instance, there will be very strong pressure from groups that support this treaty. Even if your representative has voted against past trade agreements and claims that s/he will vote against other free trade legislation in the future, it is still vital to maintain political pressure. By maintaining such pressure we send our representatives a clear message: your constituents do not want CAFTA, there is no room for a change of heart.

There are many different ways to express to our Representatives our opposition to CAFTA and demands for just trade alternatives. Among the most widely used tactics are:

- Congressional Visits (*most effective!*)
- Writing letters
- emails/postcards
- Making Phone calls

In this packet we have given you the resources to set up a meeting with your representative, write her a letter, or call her. Obviously, the more constituents a representative hears from, the better.

II. COMMUNITY EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

It is important to involve as many members from your community as you can. Please, use what you learn in this packet to engage with those around you about the subjects of free trade, fair trade, and US foreign policy. Here are a few ideas for educating your community about CAFTA and promoting action:

- 1. Hold a “fair trade” sale, with fair trade coffee and other products at your church or school.** Check with Transfair USA (<https://www.transfairusa.org/>) for list of certified fair trade distributors.
- 1. Show the video “Trading Democracy” by Bill Moyers at your church, school ...** “Trading Democracy” highlights NAFTA’s investors’ rights provisions which protect cooperate profit while undercutting local environmental and labor laws. Available at: http://www.citizen.org/trade/nafta/CH__11/articles.cfm?ID=6687 Or read or watch it on line at: http://www.pbs.org/now/transcript/transcript_tdfull.html
- 2. Organize a CAFTA workshop.** Ask SHARE for suggested speakers or do it yourself—user friendly materials, designed for first time presenters are available in English and Spanish from United for Fair Economy (www.ufenet.org).

- 1. Create a signature sheet** You can staple a signature sheet to the sample letter below to have members of your community sign on to it.
- 2. Collaborate with other concerned groups in your area.** SHARE is a member of the Stop CAFTA Coalition. The Stop CAFTA Coalition is comprised of, among others, the Quixote Center, NISGUA, CISPES, The SHARE Foundation, US El Salvador Sister Cities, Witness for Peace, and the Nicaragua Network. Visit www.stopcafta.org for a list of actions in your area, local resources, or to post your own event.

If you call us at the SHARE DC Office, at (202) 319-5542, we would be happy to help you with any other ideas you might have. Also, if you find other effective ways of connecting with your community, be sure to let us know about them so that we can pass the ideas on to other groups. Good luck!

II. CONGRESSIONAL VISIT “HOW TO” KIT

A. SETTING UP THE MEETING

Call the District Office – When you call your legislator’s office, ask to speak with the person who handles the legislator’s schedule. Tell the scheduler the date and time you would like to meet with your legislator (be flexible) and the general topics you wish to discuss. For visits to the Local Office, seek appointments during congressional recess periods (listed in section IV) when your Member returns to your district. Let the scheduler know that the meeting should take no longer than one hour. If there is more than one person attending the meeting, let the scheduler know their names and affiliations. If someone in your group knows the legislator personally or professionally, make sure that the scheduler is aware of the relationship.

Congressional visits in Washington DC – Remember that most legislative business occurs Tuesday through Thursday and that the closing days of a session are extra busy. When you arrive in Washington, call the Member’s office to confirm your appointment.

Be persistent – The objective of this initial contact is to secure a time and date to meet with your representative. Be persistent yet polite, and make it clear that YOU, the Member’s constituent, are the most important person (s)he will ever listen to. Lots of times it can be hard to get a meeting, but persistence will generally be rewarded with a meeting with your representative.

Meet with *somebody* – If your Member of Congress can’t meet with you, visit the staff member who works on the issues that most concern you. For most issues relating to Central America and CAFTA, you will want to meet with the foreign policy and trade staffers. Usually that person will be based in Washington DC, but there will also be an aide in the local office who can meet with you. Try to meet with the highest ranking aide possible in the local office, i.e.: the Senior Aide.

Confirm your appointment – After you schedule a meeting, send a confirmation letter that includes a list of those who will attend the meeting.

B. PREPARING FOR THE MEETING

Research your representative – You can use the Congressional Directory:

www.congress.org, www.house.gov, www.senate.gov . Just punch in your zip code and the site provides you with contact information and a web page for your Member of Congress. You will be able to find biographical information, committee and subcommittee assignments, and key issues of concern for your Member. Review your legislator's voting record and any publicly stated views or opinions. The Stop CAFTA website (www.stopcafta.org) can provide trade related voting histories.

Determine your agenda and goals for the meeting – Coalition members should meet before the meeting with the Member in order to determine the agenda and delegate agenda items to be raised. Have different people cover different issues, but have one person act as a facilitator for the discussion and deliver the bulk of your message.

Bring it all back home – All legislators supposedly want to improve the economy and quality of life in their district/state. It is your job to convince them that free trade agreements such as CAFTA have negative impacts on working people in all the signing countries, including people in their own congressional district.

Make sure everyone in your group is prepared – Be certain everyone agrees on the central message and what will be asked of the legislator. This way you will avoid a possible internal debate in front of your legislator. Don't feel that you have to be an expert. Most representatives of Congress are generalists. Be open to counter-arguments, but don't get stuck on them. If you don't know the answer to a question, say so. Nothing is worse than being caught in a lie or inaccuracy. Offer to look into the question and get back to the Member (this is also an excellent opportunity to stay in touch).

Prepare an information packet to leave with your legislator – This should include information on your organization including the group's contact information, as well as a description of your objectives. You should also leave a business card with the receptionist.

C. CONDUCTING THE MEETING

Be on time, listen well, and don't stay too long – *Be on time!* Introduce yourself and say what issues and legislation you want to discuss. However, make sure that all introductions are kept brief allowing more time for conversation with the representative.

Listen well! You will hear occasional indications of your representative's actual views, and you should take those opportunities to provide good information.

Don't stay too long! Try to get closure on the issues you discuss but leave room to continue the discussion at another time.

Build the relationship – If your representative has supported your coalition's positions in the past, be sure to thank him/her; if the opposite is true, consider that your visit may prevent more active opposition in the future, and perhaps even result in a surprising good vote on an important issue.

Remember: This meeting shouldn't be an end in itself. Think of it as the beginning of a relationship with your representative that will allow you to voice your opinion on topics in the future. With this in mind, make sure the relationship you build is a positive one, based on respect. Try not to be hostile.

Take notes – Make sure someone in your group takes notes on what is said during the meeting. However, don't use any recording devices. These notes should be circulated to the entire group after the meeting, as well as shared with others.

Ask his or her position – How will s/he vote? Do party leaders have positions on the issue? What is their influence likely to be? Is the office hearing from opponents? If so, what are their arguments and what groups are involved? Does the Member know any other key House Members or Senators who should be contacted to get favorable action on the bill? Is s/he willing to facilitate contact?

Ask for specific action – Always ask for specific actions; always get a specific commitment and then follow up. No matter how supportive or unsupportive your legislator is, there is always a next step. Call into your organization's central office, or visit the Stop CAFTA website to find out what specific action should be sought at the time of your meeting.

Provide Affirmation Where Possible – Look for areas of agreement and affirm them. Convey your appreciation for positive steps, no matter how small. Keep written records of meetings. Take notes for use in future contacts. What did you request? What was the response? What was promised? What are the chief areas of interest?

Thank your representative – Always begin your meeting by thanking your legislator for taking the time to visit with you. If your legislator has been supportive of our stance on free trade and social and economic justice, you should thank him/her for his/her support as well.

Follow up – Send thank you notes after the meeting to the representative, staff, or receptionist, and if commitments were made during the meeting, repeat your understanding of them.

III. TIMELINE

The process of consideration for CAFTA will begin with President Bush declaring an “intent to sign.” He will then submit to Congress “implementing legislation” which will change US laws in accordance with the treaty. This will initiate the 90 day window during which Congress will have to consider and vote on the decree. We expect the White House to declare its “intent to sign” sometime in February.

With this in mind we believe that **opposition must be raised and come to a point by late April.** The House of Representatives will be the main battle-ground for this legislation, so we have decided to concentrate our efforts there. However, we encourage you to meet with any and all of your representatives, including Senators.

Below is a Congressional calendar, which lets you know when your representative will be in his/her Local Office. It is important that you act now to reserve a meeting during these brief windows. When possible, we also encourage visits to representative’s Washington, DC Offices.

Congressional District Work Periods:

April 14-25	Spring District Work Period
May 26-30	Memorial Day District Work Period
June 30-July 4	Independence Day District Work Period
July 28 – September 2	Summer District Work Period

The above information about conducting a congressional visit was provided by:

NISGUA, Legislative Policy Work:

http://www.nisgua.org/G.A.P/legislative_policy_work.htm

Public Citizen, Grassroots Primer for Congressional District Office Visit:

<http://www.citizen.org/trade/fasttrack/action/articles.cfm?ID=5534>

Grassroots Advocacy Training Exchange, A Perfect Capitol Hill Visit:

<http://grassroots-advocacy.com/visitf.html>

American Arts Alliance, Grassroots Legislative Kit:

<http://www.americanartsalliance.org/grasskit/grasskit-index.html>

CISPES, Guide To Grass Roots Congressional Pressure: http://www.cispes.org/english/Campaign_Against_CAFTA_FTAA/Organizing_Materials.htm

IV. SAMPLE MATERIALS

*To download a copy of these materials go to:
www.share-elsalvador.org/action*

Sample Letter to your Congressperson

[Your Local Coalition Name and Address Here,
e.g., Local Fair Trade Coalition, etc.]

[Office of Representative _____]
[District Office Address]
[City, State, Zip]

Month & Date, 2004

Dear Congressman _____,

I am writing to you out of great concern about the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA).

This agreement will be presented to you for an up or down vote (Fast Track) this coming spring or summer. Undeniably trade between nations is good. It is the terms of this agreement that I question.

The US Trade Representative Robert Zoellick tells us that free trade with Central America is the road to development in that region, and a boon to economic growth in our own country, the United States. This sounds like a winning policy. But the people who will be most affected by this treaty (small farmers, small business owners, union workers, and poor women) have a very different take. Before you vote on this trade agreement consider the following questions and arguments and tell me where you stand.

Can trade between unequal partners be fair?

The US has the advantage of years of industrialization and productive growth, not to mention billions of dollars worth of agricultural and industrial subsidies. In contrast, the agriculturally based Central American nations are still working with oxen pulled plows. Trade liberalization in Central America has been proceeding piecemeal over the past decade, and the results have not been encouraging. Trade growth has failed to produce a reduction in poverty, faster economic growth, or increased democratization. Instead, it has brought rising levels of impoverishment, criminal violence, social and political instability and a hollowing out of democracy.

Is NAFTA a good model?

NAFTA, the forefather of CAFTA, has meant increased trade for Mexico; in fact, commerce in Mexico has more than tripled since 1994. However, in Mexico increased trade has not meant real economic growth. Poverty has increased from 50.9% in 1994 to 58.4% in 2001. And while economic reports show that productivity is up, wages are down by about 21%. In the rural sector, the official number of unoccupied workers quadrupled between 1993 and 2000, growing to over 2.5 million workers. This statistic doesn't reflect the 1.8 million workers who abandoned the rural sector altogether during

this period. The same story is being told for small farmers in the US, who are unable to compete with the monopolizing force of subsidized agri-business. If NAFTA is our model, we can predict that Central America will be a big loser.

What is the cost of mass migration from South to North?

Last year 300,000 - 400,000 Central Americans fled north towards the US. They come because they can't earn enough to eat in their own countries. Some experts even suggest that the Central American governments are encouraging this movement North in hopes of swelling their national income with US dollars loyally sent back as remittances to family members. CAFTA will unquestionably increase the number of Central American workers who take flight to the US. As you know, the risks and challenges of this forced migration are great for both the immigrants and the US cities that receive them.

Do unequal labor laws and low wages lead to a race to the bottom?

Since NAFTA we have seen millions of jobs flow from North to South as businesses seek cheaper labor. But lower wages is not the only incentive. Foreign investment is also taking advantage of weak labor laws, enforcement procedures, and local opposition to unionizing. To protect workers on both sides of the border, any trade agreement must include parity of enforcement for all labor laws.

Has there been true representation at the negotiating table or is it heavily weighted towards large-scale business interests?

Genuine input and participation in the negotiations by civil society groups in the U.S. and the five Central American countries was non-existent. At the same time, the U.S. Business Roundtable and financial elites in Central America had constant access to their governments' negotiation teams and trade ministers. The negotiations were defined by a complete lack of transparency; not only have negotiators kept the most controversial information from the public, but also from the members of the Congressional Oversight Group (COG) for CAFTA. This process has been antithetical to democracy.

There is too much at stake. CAFTA will devastate the Central American rural sector, cause mass unemployment in the region, and increase the gap between the rich and poor. It will also result in the further marginalization of the small American farmer, encourage industries to take their jobs to countries that fail at the most base levels of labor regulation, and create even greater stresses on the American infrastructure as growing numbers of immigrants are pushed north from Central America.

For these reasons, I implore you to **vote No on CAFTA.**

Sincerely,

SAMPLE CONGRESSIONAL OFFICE VISIT SCHEDULING LETTER FOR OLD MEMBERS

[Thanks to Citizen's Trade Campaign]

[Your Local Coalition Name and Address Here,
e.g., Local Fair Trade Coalition, etc.]

[District Office Scheduler]
[Office of Representative _____]
[District Office Address]
[City, State, Zip]

Month & Date, 2004

Dear [Name of Scheduler]:

On behalf of the [local coalition's name] I would like to request a meeting to discuss the Representative's perspectives and positions — and the concerns of this coalition – relating to international trade policy.

The [XXX group] is [brief description including a listing of coalition members].

We are eager to sit down with the Congresswoman/man as soon as possible to discuss the impacts of trade and investment treaties upon this congressional district, as well as nationally and internationally. In particular we would like to discuss issues relating to the current negotiations for a Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA). As concerned citizens and voters, we are eager to discuss Representative _____'s positions on these issues and look forward to working with him/her.

The meeting should last no longer than one hour.

Participants in the meeting will include [list participants]. I look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience. If you have any questions or comments feel free to contact me at [local contact information here].

Thank you for your consideration.

Very truly yours,

SAMPLE CONGRESSIONAL OFFICE VISIT SCHEDULING LETTER FOR NEW MEMBERS

[Thanks to Citizen's Trade Campaign]

[Your Local Coalition Name and Address Here,
e.g., Local Fair Trade Coalition, etc.]

[District Office Scheduler]
[Office of Representative _____]
[District Office Address]
[City, State, Zip]

Month & Date, 2004

Dear [Name of Scheduler]:

On behalf of the [local coalition's name], I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Representative _____ on His/Her election to Congress. Also, we would like to request a meeting to discuss the Representative's perspectives and positions — and the concerns of this coalition — relating to international trade policy.

The [XXX group] is [brief description including a listing of coalition members].

We are eager to sit down with the Congresswoman/man as soon as possible to discuss the impacts of trade and investment treaties upon this congressional district, as well as nationally and internationally. In particular we would like to discuss issues relating to the current negotiations for a Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA). As concerned citizens and voters, we are eager to discuss Representative _____'s positions on these issues and look forward to working with him/her.

The meeting should last no longer than one hour. Participants in the meeting will include [list participants].

On behalf of the [name of coalition], I would again like to congratulate the Representative on his/her election, and look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience. If you have any questions or comments feel free to contact me at [local contact information here].

Thank you for your consideration.

Very truly yours,