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## CAFTA is a mistake repeated

By ANDREW GUSSERT

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Ben Franklin said the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. Early Thursday, the Central American Free Trade Agreement passed through the House by two votes, with a bundle of side promises saying it would be different this time.

Unless we stop this flawed approach of NAFTA and CAFTA, we will continue to outsource more Wisconsin jobs, offshore more Wisconsin business, jeopardize farmers, harm women and children and destroy our environment.

A coalition of strange bedfellows rose up in Wisconsin to fight CAFTA. Farmers sat shoulder to shoulder with environmentalists. Catholics united with feminist groups. Peaceniks held hands with the John Birch Society. We lost the vote but won the debate. People oppose our current trade policies and want to see change.

Sue Beitlich, president of the Wisconsin Farmers Union, argued the North American Free Trade Agreement failed to deliver on promises made by politicians more than a decade ago, and CAFTA will extend the trend. "CAFTA is a continuation of failed trade policies. We were a net exporter of agricultural products before NAFTA's passage 10 years ago; today, we are a net importer," she has said.

A majority of Wisconsin's congressional delegation voted against

CAFTA. Every Republican congressman in Wisconsin voted for it.

Rep. Gwen Moore (D-Wis.) opposed CAFTA and has been quoted as saying, "In Wisconsin, there are high levels of unemployment, and manufacturing jobs are hemorrhaging at an astounding pace."

Just look at the numbers. NAFTA helped send 2.5 million manufacturing jobs over the border. States like Wisconsin were hit particularly hard: From March 2001 to January 2004, we lost more than 74,000 manufacturing jobs, a decline of 14% in our manufacturing base. CAFTA will continue to outsource more jobs.

Once thought to impact only industrial sectors, outsourcing now threatens computer programmers, IT

specialists, call-center workers, paralegals, technical writers, accountants, tax professionals and public service workers. Put simply, if your job uses a phone or a computer, outsourcing trade policies impact you. If you can telecommute, your job can likely be outsourced.

Brett Hulsey, Dane County supervisor and Sierra Club advocate, fought to stop NAFTA when it was first introduced in 1994. Since then, he's seen lost jobs, lower environmental standards and the dumbing down of trade laws. "CAFTA's environmental provisions are weak, unenforceable and full of loopholes," Hulsey has said.

"The fundamental problem with CAFTA is that it was written by corporate America for corporate America," said Rep. Dave Obey (D-Wis.) in a statement. The pact will erode the living standards for U.S. workers "as corporations race for the cheapest labor costs in the region," he said.

Rep. Tammy Baldwin (D-Wis.) cited Labor Department figures, putting U.S. job losses blamed on NAFTA at more than 507,384. In the meantime, trade deficits with Mexico and Canada have only risen since that pact was signed, she said.

Rep. Ron Kind (D-Wis.) sounded his opposition in August, citing problems with enforceability of worker rights provisions in CAFTA.

According to Doug Drake, Wisconsin director of the United Steelworkers, "More people are out of work, jobs are being outsourced and companies are being offshored. These agreements just don't make sense."

It is time to change the way we draft and negotiate trade deals, instead of repeating the same mistakes and expecting different results. One intelligent response would be to stop the insanity.

We need to negotiate provisions for worker rights and the environment into these deals or expect to see continued outsourcing and offshoring. It would be insane to expect anything different.

*Andrew Gussert of Madison is director of the Wisconsin Fair Trade Coalition.*

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