

ABRAMS
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Bush Lobbies Republicans on CAFTA Bill

JUL. 27 11:10 A.M. ET In a rare piece of lobbying on Capitol Hill, President Bush appealed personally to fellow Republicans Wednesday to close ranks behind a free trade agreement with Central America that faces a **very close floor vote**.

The House was beginning debate on the Central American Free Trade Agreement later in the day, with **a vote coming as early as Wednesday night**. With Democrats strongly against it, passage depends on keeping Republican defections to a minimum.

The president reminded Republicans that while some might oppose CAFTA for parochial interests "we are here not only to represent our districts but to represent the nation," House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, R-Texas, said after the meeting that lasted more than an hour.

DeLay predicted a tough vote, but "we will pass CAFTA tonight."

DeLay said the president may have won over one unidentified Republican when he noted that Central American countries have contributed troops in the war against terrorism.

Bush, who has invested considerable time and effort to winning approval of CAFTA, was accompanied by Vice President Dick Cheney and U.S. Trade Representative Rob Portman at the closed meeting of House Republicans. It isn't unusual for presidents to press their agendas with members of their own party or the opposition party, but they usually do it at the White House.

Bush's chief spokesman, Scott McClellan, said Bush planned to address other issues likely to come up as Congress rushes toward summer recess, including major energy and highway legislation.

Finding GOP unity on CAFTA could be crucial if the trade deal that the administration signed a year ago with Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic is to survive.

The Democratic leadership, in a notice Tuesday, reminded lawmakers that "this will be an extremely close vote, and attendance is critical."

The Senate approved the pact last month, but the House, with Democratic opposition and a large group of opposing or undeclared Republicans, is a harder sell.

The agreement would eliminate tariffs and other trade barriers on U.S. exports to the six nations and increase protections for investment and intellectual property. Democrats say **CAFTA, like past free trade deals, will lead to a loss of U.S. jobs while doing little to prevent the exploitation of Central American workers.**

Republican opposition stems from the jobs issue as well as concerns that the agreement will hurt the U.S. textile and sugar industries.

Bush in recent months has held a summit with the leaders of all six CAFTA nations, met individually with dozens of lawmakers and given speeches to Hispanic and other groups promoting the deal, which he argues will also benefit U.S. national security by shoring up Central America's fragile democracies.

His administration has also had some success in swaying undecided Republicans with side deals offering protections for sugar and textile manufacturers.

Groups on both sides of the issue held news and telephone conferences Tuesday to press their case.

"Trade creates jobs and lifts people out of poverty," House Speaker Dennis Hastert, R-Ill., said at a news conference with Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez and representatives from pro-CAFTA Hispanic groups. "And there's nothing like a stable society to fight terrorism and strengthen democracy, freedom and rule of law."

Rep. Hilda Solis, D-Calif., said CAFTA was "a bad deal for Central Americans and also for Latinos in this community."

"I can tell you that the exploitation of workers will continue in Central America," Solis said.

SAY NO! TO CAFTA NOW!

The U.S. House is scheduled to VOTE on CAFTA TODAY! Please take this link to tell your representative to STOP CAFTA NOW!

http://www.unionvoice.org/campaign/CWA_NOCAFTA/

In Unity-Strength & Solidarity:

Steve Tisza, President

CWA Local 4250/Chicago