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Wednesday, July 27, 2005

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Washington, DC – Congresswoman Doris O. Matsui (CA-5) will vote against the Dominican Republic – Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) when it is brought to the House floor. In a floor statement she reiterated her opposition, emphasizing the need for the U.S. to prioritize basic human decency and fairness when negotiating trade agreements.

“As a world leader, the United States has a crucial role to play on trade; we cannot step-back from the global community,” stated Matsui. “However, free trade must be tempered with meaningful policy which acknowledges that each trade agreement produces winners and losers and it is our responsibility to do right by those displaced in the process. CAFTA fails in this and in doing so is fatally flawed.”

Understanding the need for a vigorous debate of this legislation, Matsui offered an amendment to allow eight hours of debate during the Rules Committee hearing on CAFTA. This would have allowed the same amount of time as for NAFTA. But the Republicans on the Committee voted down the amendment. And the House will only have a mere two hours to debate an agreement, which in its entirety is over three thousand, six hundred pages – the implications of which may well determine the future course of U.S. trade policy.

Continued Matsui, “The future direction and character of trade will be shaped by the House’s actions, as the implications of this vote will resonate far beyond Latin America. While trade agreements encourage the flow of goods and services, they also embody important values and principles. What message does it send if we pass trade agreements that concentrate benefits in the hands of the privileged few and special interests at the expense of workers

here and in some of the poorest countries in the world?”

On May 28, 2004 the United States, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua signed the CAFTA and the Dominican Republic was added on August 5. CAFTA is the first free trade agreement negotiated by the U.S. with any developing country that has weak labor laws and a history of suppressing the rights of workers. Additionally, concerns have been raised about CAFTA’s provisions on the environment, textiles, sugar and intellectual property rights.

“Free trade agreements are a good thing, but only when based on solid principles that reflect a concern for all parties involved,” concluded Matsui. “CAFTA fails to meet this standard.”

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