

Large crowd gathers for anti-NAFTA rally

By SUSAN ALLEN
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MONTPELIER — The message from Michigan Rep. David Bonior to Vermonters was simple: NAFTA will drive Vermont jobs to Mexico, Mexican milk will flood the U.S. market, and wages at home will plummet.

"This agreement is going to rip the heart out of communities across America," Bonior, a Democrat, said during an afternoon rally Saturday at the Statehouse in Montpelier.

"I think about dairy farmers in Vermont. I think about auto workers in Michigan," he told the crowd. "Those are the people who made this country great and we ought not be selling them down the river."

Bonior joined Vermont Rep. Bernard Sanders and others to rally opposition to the proposed North American Free Trade Agreement, which would eliminate trade barriers between Canada, the U.S. and Mexico.

Critics, including Sanders, argue large companies will simply close up shop in the U.S. and move to Mexico, where wages

are lower, environmental laws lax and safety standards virtually non-existent.

Vermont's independent congressman told the crowd that NAFTA is not about raising salaries in Mexico. "NAFTA is about lowering wages in the United States," Sanders said. "It's about the de-industrialization of this country."

Ron Pickering of Brattleboro, newly elected president of the Vermont Labor Council — the AFL-CIO's top governing board in the state — joined the cry.

"Vermont cannot afford to lose any jobs," Pickering told the crowd. He urged the group to be vocal, adding that Vermonters "need to tell Washington where Vermont stands on NAFTA."

Bonior also urged the crowd to get involved in the debate, noting that the House is set to act on the proposed trade agreement, which has the full support of the Clinton administration, in mid-November.

"People have got to raise their voices as we enter the last three weeks of this debate," he said. Bonior recently announced that



AP/Craig Line
SAY NO TO NAFTA — Rep. David Bonior, D-Mich., and Rep. Bernard Sanders, I-Vt., greet a crowd gathered at the Statehouse Saturday to rally against the North American Free Trade Agreement.

he has secured 208 House votes against NAFTA, 10 votes short of defeating the agreement.

The trade agreement has sparked debate in Vermont.

Sanders introduced legislation that would reduce the salaries of

the U.S. president and Congress to the level of their Mexican counterparts if NAFTA is approved, arguing the agreement essentially asks the same of American workers.