

# Vermonters protest NAFTA

## Statehouse rally draws a crowd

By Susan Allen  
The Associated Press

MONTPELIER — The message from Michigan's U.S. Rep. David Bonior to Vermonters on Saturday 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 at the Statehouse.



**Bernard Sanders** "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's U.S. Rep. Bernard Sanders and others to rally opposition to the proposed North American Free Trade Agreement, which would eliminate trade barriers between Canada, the United States and Mexico.

Critics argue that large U.S. companies will 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



CRAIG LINE, The Associated Press

About 300 Vermonters join a rally Saturday at the Statehouse to protest the North American Free Trade Agreement.

jobs," Pickering told the crowd. He said Vermonters "need to tell Washington where Vermont stands on NAFTA."

Bonior noted that the House is set to act on the trade agreement in mid-November. He recently announced that he has secured 208 House votes against NAFTA — 10 votes short of defeating the pact.

The trade agreement has sparked debate in Vermont.

Sanders introduced legislation that would reduce the salaries of the president and Congress to the level of their Mexican counterparts if NAFTA were approved.

But the Vermont Chamber of Commerce has urged business people to support the proposal, saying NAFTA would improve the U.S. economy.

Rod McCormick, a state government analyst who lives in Essex Junction,

agrees. "To me what will happen with NAFTA is that it will level the playing fields and allow American products made in America to be sold in Mexico," he said.

"I think Bernie is too beholden to the big unions," he said. "The big unions are very conservative and don't want to change anything. They are very afraid of change and competition, and this reflects that."