

# Mexican trip confirms Sanders' stand on NAFTA

By Aki Soga

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Rep. Bernard Sanders, I-Vt., has seen the future under the North American Free Trade Agreement in the high-tech factories and shanty towns that line the U.S.-Mexican border.

In the free-trade zones on the Mexican side of the border stand state-of-the-art manufacturing plants, set up by U.S. corporations, Sanders said. "The contrast is ... you walk across the street to the homes in which the workers live and what you find is a shack with no running water, no electricity."

Sanders returned Monday from a four-day congressional mission to Mexico made to prepare for debate on the free trade pact likely in November.

The Senate is likely to approve the pact, but a fight is expected in the

House, he said. President Clinton's administration, the Mexican government and U.S. corporations have launched a campaign to ensure passage of the treaty, he said.

NAFTA, which would eliminate barriers to trade and investment between Mexico and the United States and Canada, would mean the loss of U.S. jobs and the increased exposure of Mexican workers to hazardous health and environmental conditions, he said.

"No one should think that these plants being produced in Mexico are old-fashioned, unproductive sweatshops," he said. "American corporations are investing billions of dollars in state-of-the-art in Mexico and the ... productivity is very high and wages are 10, 15, 20 percent of U.S. wages."

Women working in U.S.-owned

plants in Matamoros, a town opposite Brownsville, Texas, told Sanders they blame conditions in their workplace for their families' health problems.

"She feels that her miscarriage and other medical problems were directly associated with the pollution in the plant," he said of a woman working in an electronics plant.

The health dangers are not limited to Mexico.

Sanders said Dr. Carmen Rocco, a prominent Brownsville pediatrician, told



**Bernard Sanders**

him she suspects toxins released by plants along the border are responsible for the high rate of babies born in the Brownsville-Matamoros area without fully developed brains.

Sanders also met with Mexican farmers who are concerned about losing their lands because of cheap U.S. corn entering their markets if trade barriers go down.

"There would be massive displacement," he said. "This will only increase the amount of illegal workers in the states."

"Under NAFTA, these trends for Mexicans will continue, and I think NAFTA is part of the deindustrialization process in the United States which has already cost us millions of manufacturing jobs," he said.