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**Sanders Responds to White House
Meeting on Anti-Sweatshop Initiative**

Rep. Bernie Sanders, I-VT., was at the White House today for the announcement of a new anti-sweatshop initiative developed by a presidential task force. Sanders was invited by President Clinton to the ceremony due to his efforts to combat child labor, including legislation he is sponsoring in Congress to prohibit the importing of products that are made by children under 14.

The anti-sweatshop agreement, "The Apparel Industry Partnership," was reached by a presidential task force which was created last August by former Labor Secretary Robert Reich. The task force is comprised of a coalition of major apparel manufacturers, labor, and human rights groups.

Under the agreement, a code of conduct on wages and working conditions would be negotiated over the next six months for apparel factories world-wide that American companies use. A newly created industry association would oversee monitors who inspect garment factories and give a seal of approval to companies that comply with the code of conduct. Companies that comply with the code would then be able to put a label on their clothing informing customers that it was not made in a sweatshop.

The corporate members of the task force also agreed to a broad rule on a maximum 60-hour workweek. The task force is calling for a basic workweek of 48 hours in countries that do not already have a standard of fewer hours, and would set a 12-hour limit on overtime. If workers volunteered to work longer overtime during busy periods, they could.

However, Sanders said he was disturbed by the position the task force took in the agreement concerning wages. The group had only recommended that factories pay the legal minimum wage in the country where they are located.

Sanders said, "This is an issue that I have been working on now for a number of years and I am delighted that it is now getting attention from the White House. This agreement is a good first step, but we have a very long way to go. The Congress should pass legislation banning the import of any products made by child labor. It is unacceptable that Third World children are now doing work at 20 cents an hour that American workers used to perform at a living wage. We must continue our efforts to demand that corporate America reinvests in this country, and not hire desperate Third World children at starvation wages. We need to make fundamental changes in our trade policy."

Sanders is an original co-sponsor of the "Child Labor Deterrence Act" and is a sponsor of the "Bonded Child Labor Elimination Act." The measures which would prohibit the importation of products to the U.S. that are made by children under 14 who are employed in manufacturing and mining, and prohibit the importation of products made by children in bondage.

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