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Sanders Pushes Legislation to Prohibit Child Labor

Rep. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., today announced he will be strongly pushing two measures in Congress to combat child labor. Sanders will be an original co-sponsor of the "Child Labor Deterrence Act" and a sponsor of "The Bonded Child Labor Elimination Act."

At a Burlington press conference this morning, Sanders said, "There are as many as 200 million children today who are at work, in some cases, under terrible conditions. These children will never see the inside of a classroom, will never learn to read, or to write. Many of them work ten to fifteen hours a day making products exported for sale in shopping malls, sporting goods stores, and oriental rug shops all across America.

"Exploited children toil in factories, mines, fields, at looms, and even in brothels, sacrificing their youth, health, and innocence for little or no wages. They are hand-stitching the Nike and Adidas soccer balls that our kids practice with every day. The very same soccer balls that were used at the Atlanta Olympics last year. They are sewing the blouses, slacks and shirts that millions of us have purchased and wear. They are making Mattel Barbie dolls that little girls all across America play with.

Sanders continued, "The irony here is that many of these same products that are now being produced by exploited children in Latin America, China, India, Pakistan and other countries, used to be manufactured by American workers here in the United States, who earned a living wage. But Corporate America found that their profits could soar by running to desperate third world countries and exploiting children. So, American workers lose their jobs and kids around the world are paid 20 or 50 cents an hour to produce products for American multi-national corporations."

Sanders said he will be introducing two measures which will combat the exploitation of child labor while promoting better economic policy.

"These measures will prohibit the importing of products into the American marketplace that are made by children under 14 who are employed in manufacturing or mining, and prohibit the importing of any products made by children in bondage. We think this is the right thing to do, and its good economic policy.

"This issue is a moral issue about whether or not we as a nation should be allowing the importation of products made by children -- some living in virtual slavery. Its also an economic issue. What type of trade policy is it that lets American workers be thrown out on the street, and allows companies to go abroad and manufacture products made by children making 20 or 30 cents an hour? It doesn't make any sense to me," Sanders concluded.

Contact: Tina Wisell at 802-862-0697. (Summaries of the legislation are available upon request.)