

My name is Patti Dunbar.

I own Best Friends Day Care, in Bucksport, Maine.

I'd like to talk to you about the affect that free trade and the subsequent, job loss, here in Maine has had and will continue to have on our children.

Some of you are aware of conditions regarding children in other countries because of unfair labor practices, such as child labor and the exploitation of under age workers, but what about our children.

Five years ago a middle class, working family of four, could have easily had an annual income of 60,000.00 or more. On the average, this same family would have probably been paying around 10,000.00 a year for quality child-care. Quite a chunk of change, but possible.

Unfortunately, in this same five year span, thousands of Maine families have lost those good payining jobs, due to outsourcing, (corporations moving their companies to other countries where there are no environmental guidelines or labor laws, and using this unfair advantage to make a bigger profit,) thus job loss in major proportion, forcing our working families to find other jobs at a much lower rate of pay and in lots of cased without benefits.

The same family, now, could have an annual income that has been cut by by 20,000.00, or even more.

So many Maine families find themselves in this dilema.

What happens to the children? Childcare costs are now a major issue. It is no longer possible to continue to pay the price for the kind of child-care every family wants and every child deserves.

So what now?

Perhaps the little old lady down the street that falls asleep in her chair every afternoon, or maybe the unregulated provider with 16 children, under the age of 5 , who's also trying to make ends meet.

Maybe the 8 year old will go home to an empty house, after school.

The choices families are faced with, in regard to the task of providing care for their children, while they work , are terrible.

Do we pay the house payment and buy groceries ,or do we catch up on doctors bills, and where in the world are we going to come up with the money to pay the babysitter.

Thousands of families right here in Maine are living from day to day, from financial crisis to financial crisis, working long hours, just to put a roof over their head and food on the table, and the children are slipping through the cracks!

A kindergarden teacher that I have worked with for fifteen years, stopped me the other day. She asked me the same question, I have asked you here today. What is happening to our kids? " In the past two years,"she commented, " we have seen such a decline in school readiness." "The first thing we have to do with so many of the new kindergardeners is to teach the most basic of self help skills and, some how, get across to them the necessity of following simple directions, before we can even attempt academics." "These children are going to be so far behind."

She went on to say, "even more disturbing, their emotional well-being is deteriorating just as rapidly." "What will it come to?"

My answer to her and to you, is the same.

The long term affects that this economic fiasco will have on our children's future is devastating.

We must help our working families, here in Maine to find their way back to financial, and emotional stability, for the sake of their future and ours.

WE must stop CAFTA, and fight for reforms to existing trade policies.

PLEASE, we can win this battle, if we stand together and make our voices heard.

Let your senators and congressmen know that they still work for you, and make it clear to them, WE DON'T WANT CAFTA.

Corporations like, International Paper, Wal Mart, and McDonalds, just to mention a few, do not have the best interest of our communities and families, at heart. Their concern is the almighty dollar, and that alone.

It is our responsibility to protect and support our village, our community and our families, and remember, it takes a village to raise a child.

Thank you!

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