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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Think Caribbean

The Post's editorial, "Think Caribbean" [March 1], supporting an extension and expansion of the Caribbean Basin Initiative, is intriguing for what it did not say. It suggests that Caribbean countries are too small to prosper without access to larger markets, but fails to mention that the CBI is a bilateral trading arrangement that has undercut efforts to promote regional economic cooperation through the Caribbean common market and other regional institutions.

Nor does The Post inform its readers that, in gearing their economies to a U.S. market that will give only marginally increased access to their goods, Caribbean countries have experienced growing deficits in their trade with the United States. Most troubling is the enormous increase in the Caribbean food import bill under the CBI. Furthermore, the over-emphasis on the export of unprocessed agricultural commodities has set back the development of local economies and effectively denied small food producers the credit and services they require. In Jamaica this has forced thousands of small farmers into marijuana production. So much for the U.S. anti-drug effort that The Post mentions.

In the manufacturing sector, the CBI has similarly done little to develop Carib-

bean capabilities other than those needed in the assembling of components manufactured abroad. In fact, the proposed legislation to extend the CBI would increase the proportion of U.S. parts in Caribbean goods entering the U.S. market. And the CBI has, through the promotion of export-processing zones, served to undermine the rights and well-being of Caribbean workers, especially women, while pitting them in an unfair competition with U.S. workers.

All of this and more has been related to Congress by a broad range of Caribbean representatives in a series of forums convened in the region by Rep. George W. Crockett Jr. (D-Mich.) and his House Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs. Where are these perspectives reflected in The Post's analysis or in the Senate bill?

The CBI legislation, in its current configuration, may satisfy some U.S. international business interests, but senators should not fool themselves in thinking that it will satisfy the needs of the vast majority of the Caribbean people. The disillusionment in the region with the CBI is deep and broad, and this time the Senate would do well to listen to what the people are saying before injecting a helping hand.

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