

VETO MESSAGE:

VETO MESSAGE - No. 15

TO THE SENATE:

I am returning herewith, without my approval, the following bill:
Senate Bill Number 6860, entitled:

"AN ACT to amend the labor law, in relation to the labeling of
certain articles of apparel"

NOT APPROVED

This bill addresses a goal of the highest importance; ensuring that laborers in the apparel industry work in conditions that do not violate their basic rights, and protect them from exploitation and abuse. It seeks to advance these important aims by requiring the Commissioner of the Department of Labor (DOL) to create a label or symbol that manufacturers, contractors and retailers can affix to clothing to show that its production and sale does not involve mistreatment of workers.

Despite the sponsors' worthy ends, the proposal has significant flaws. In particular, it provides no means by which DOL can determine whether businesses warrant such a label, and I can see no way in which this can be accomplished without significant expense well beyond DOL's present means. Given that most apparel today is made abroad, DOL could not verify that a particular article met the standards for its label without investigating working conditions in other states and countries. DOL, however, has no investigative jurisdiction to operate outside New York, and insufficient resources to carry out the enormous monitoring task that adequate implementation of this proposal would entail. The result,

I fear, would either be that the program would necessitate extraordinary expense, or would require DOL to provide its label without adequate assurance that it was warranted.

Even if DOL could assure itself that a particular clothing manufacturer adequately safeguarded the labor standards of its employees, it would need to continuously examine the manufacturer's conduct to make sure this did not change. And if DOL determined that the business no longer merited the label, it is unclear how it could bring about its removal from merchandise already on the market.

I very much share the sponsors' desire to find more effective ways to ensure that apparel workers are treated fairly and not subjected to sweatshop conditions, but I do not believe that this bill presents a workable framework in its current form. I have directed my staff to work with the sponsors and DOL to determine if the worthy goals of this bill can be advanced by addressing the problems noted above, or through such other possible vehicles as procurement policies, heightened enforcement and sanctions, or cooperation with other states and localities in the compilation and dissemination of information on particular companies.

The bill is disapproved.
PATERSON

(signed) DAVID A.
