

Supply

I hope at the very least in the discussions that some heed is paid to that particular issue during the constitutional debate and the debate that we are going to end up having in this House on that issue.

There is another spending issue that relates directly to forests and ties in directly with the work or the lack of it I suppose by the Minister for International Trade. That comes to the whole question of the softwood tariff dispute we have now with the United States. As you know, Mr. Speaker, I led a delegation of New Democrat MPs from the interior of British Columbia as well as my colleague from Thunder Bay in northern Ontario to Washington to meet with American legislators and officials on this issue. I think it was a very important two days. We delivered a strong message to the Americans about Canada and about our view on this issue.

We have some well known differences with this government's approach to this whole issue, but on the question of the softwood dispute we gave a united message to the Americans. I say that Canadians want to ensure that from this government they get the same message as well.

I have said on numerous occasions that it is important that we keep pressure on our own government. It is a pretty clear perception among most Canadians that this government just rolls over and plays dead whenever George Bush and the Commerce Department in Washington, D.C. basically tells it what to do. We found that in this dispute, whereas yet we have not heard a formal word from the United States, the Commerce Department or the Bush administration as to whether this whole softwood dispute can even be referred to this much vaunted dispute settlement mechanism that the minister of trade so often talks about. It is revealing of the weakness of the free trade agreement that even after three years of operation this government still has to plead with Washington, D.C. for this whole dispute to be settled by even a weak dispute settlement mechanism, which it is.

• (1520)

We have not heard the end of that yet. We may end up having a dispute over the dispute settlement of all things. It gives an indication of how much trouble we are in with this dispute. We are on the verge of perhaps the most massive trade dispute in Canadian history between our two governments. It is over an issue that is of critical

importance, not just to the entire country but in particular to British Columbia which makes some 80 per cent of the softwood lumber exports to the United States.

Another issue I have raised throughout my riding and in different parts of the country is an important issue for many of the smaller communities in this country. In many cases we have to plead with different levels of government to get the kinds of services and programs we need. In many cases larger centres across the country take so much for granted. I guess I am reminded of that each day here in Ottawa where, of course, we would expect our nation's capital to have those kinds of buildings and monuments to our country and to the history of this area. However, at the same time, let us not forget the contribution made by the rural communities, the resource communities across the country. Yes, they are away from the major population centres, but they are just as deserving when it comes to government services and programs.

I am reminded in particular of a case where we were pleased to have convinced the Minister of Communications to provide some funds for an art gallery in Prince George. I would like to encourage the government to go a step further. We have to take a look at using some of the funds under the communications subagreement to help with the art gallery in Prince George.

In the election campaign in 1988 the previous government clearly rejected any federal help for a performing arts centre in Prince George. I have collected information since that election. I have been diligent at this because it was my sense that this government had spent millions of dollars elsewhere across the country on similar ventures but, of course, gave the cold shoulder to Prince George. To date that evidence shows that some \$143 million in projects similar to that which we have been lobbying and working for in Prince George has been spent and authorized by this government, ranging from the Comedy Museum in Montreal. I have nothing against a good joke or project but we are just asking for our fair share.

I ask that the government give serious consideration to those proposals because that is the kind of nitty-gritty work the Government of Canada can do to show Canadians and residents of these communities that small communities are as deserving as any major population centre for the kinds of projects which bestow pride on a community for the work they have done.