

• (1500)

SOFTWOOD LUMBER INDUSTRY

Mr. Stan Dromisky (Thunder Bay—Atikokan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this question is for the Minister for International Trade.

For several months Canadian lumber companies have been waiting for the United States to begin repaying the bulk of softwood lumber duties collected on Canadian exports. Can the minister tell this House when Canadian companies will begin receiving repayment of these funds?

Hon. Roy MacLaren (Minister for International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, those in the United States lumber industry who had challenged the NAFTA procedures have now agreed unanimously to withdraw their lawsuit.

Accordingly, with the removal of this final obstacle, I understand that the United States Department of Commerce will in the next days begin to return the deposits of Canadian lumber companies, totalling some \$800 million plus interest.

I should add that the Canadian and United States governments will join in a consultative process to facilitate trade in lumber on both sides of our border.

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TRIBUTES

The Speaker: My colleagues, it is quite probable that this will be our last question period this year. Today, I want to do something that I know you will agree with. The House is saying goodbye to three of its House officers who have been with us for a great many years.

In offering tribute, I would like André Fréchette, the head page who has been with us for 42 years, to please come and stand with me on my right.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

The Speaker: I would also like to invite our two deputy sergeants-at-arms. They have always been at that end of the House but for today, gentlemen, I wonder if you would join me here in front of the Speaker's chair.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

The Speaker: I would first call on the member for Kingston and the Islands.

Mr. Peter Milliken (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is the last working day on the floor of the House for our chief page, André Fréchette. He has had an amazing term of service in this House. What is more amazing is that the 41 years he has worked here represents more than 80 per cent of his life and I do not mean working life.

Of the 10 Prime Ministers who have been in office since the beginning of his employment in this House, nine have benefited from time to time from his assistance. I am certain there is no

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other living Canadian who can claim to have personally assisted nine Prime Ministers not to mention 14 leaders of the opposition, scores of cabinet ministers and probably more than 1,000 members of Parliament.

During his years of service he has learned more about the House and its workings than most members. He always seems to be the first to know what is going to happen in the House, often being able to provide helpful advice to members and to other staff.

Mr. Fréchette started his career with the House as a page when he was barely into his teens and it is only just that he should retire now while he is still a youngish man.

• (1505)

We will miss him very much in this House, Mr. Speaker, but of course we will be reminded of his presence on a daily basis because of the very able staff that he has trained to function in his absence.

[Translation]

Mr. Fréchette, we wish you a long and happy retirement.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, three employees of the House of Commons are about to retire, namely Léo Robitaille, who has been with us since 1953, Sam Renaud, since 1954, and André Fréchette, since 1951.

Serving the members of this House takes dedication, patience and understanding, and we would be unable to do our job without their support.

I would like to comment particularly on Mr. Fréchette's career which kept him in the House for 43 years. He started working here when he was 11, under Louis Saint-Laurent. He has known 12 speakers and several generations of members. I think this is a record, and should be in the Guinness Book of Records.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Duceppe: I wish to thank Mr. Robitaille, Mr. Renaud and Mr. Fréchette on behalf of all members of the Bloc Québécois.

We wish you a long and happy retirement!

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

[English]

Mr. Darrel Stinson (Okanagan—Shuswap, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, today it is both an honour and indeed a pleasure to pay tribute on behalf of the Reform Party of Canada to my friend, chief page André Fréchette, on the occasion of his retirement.

Mr. Fréchette was born in Hull and first came to work in this place in 1951. He became chief page in 1980. What are his plans for retirement? We know he enjoys bowling every week, and we wish him all success to bowl perfect games. In the summer he knows the many wonderful locations where he can pick every kind of wild berry around the area.