

We have been hurt.

Our exports have been hurt.

And, most importantly, the Canada/U.S. relationship has been hurt.

If unchecked, such a protectionist trend can only lead to animosity and strident exchanges. For example, when the U.S. International Trade Administration slapped on duties of up to 85% on Canadian potash, Canadian producers and the Saskatchewan government were outraged, calling the action "simply illogical, grossly unfair, absurd and surprising".

U.S. corn producers and the U.S. government reacted the same way when Canada countervailed U.S. corn. U.S. Trade Representative Clayton Yeutter called that action unwarranted and astounding.

I must admit that I too have been guilty of this kind of rhetoric when I called the U.S. action against Canadian softwood lumber "artificial and contrived" -- of course, in my case, I was justified.

These kinds of exchanges are inflammatory and can be destructive. These are the exchanges of opponents, not allies. These are the exchanges of partisans, not partners.

Canadians understand that the U.S. wants fair trade. Canadians understand that the U.S. is grappling with a large trade deficit. What Canadians do not understand is the solution proposed by Congress -- a trade bill that will cripple America's trading partners -- and America's trading industries.

In light of legislation currently before Congress, I suggest that congressmen who claim to be fair traders have a lot to prove.

As the Wall Street Journal said this week, "the omnibus trade and competitiveness act of 1987 looks less like a fair-trade bill than it does an omnibus bonanza for any special interest with a checkbook and a congressional phone list".

I applaud this kind of editorial realism because, frankly, it tells it like it is.

Many trade remedy actions amount to little more than caving in to special interest. While they are allegedly intended to "level the playing field", they may be used to tip the balance against foreign competitors.