

and thousands of jobs that have been lost to date and the risk of losing more in the very near future.

Today the province of British Columbia is mostly affected by this countervailing duty. It has some 333 sawmills and 700 small ones, which employ a total of 28,000 people in normal conditions and a further 25,000 are employed in the logging industry.

I would just like to remind the government that on top of the increases in stumpage fees that the B.C. industry was already paying, some \$650 million had been paid since the inception of the memorandum of understanding and which then bottomed down to a zero per cent surtax because of the increase in the stumpage fees. Today they are back at 14.48 per cent.

An hon. member: A double tax.

Mr. Bélair: Many northern Ontario mills and B.C. mills, as well as Quebec mills, will feel the crunch. There will be thousands and thousands of lay-offs across the country. Who should be liable? Who should be responsible for those? This government should be responsible.

During Question Period yesterday I asked the Minister for International Trade what his government was prepared to do for both the industry and the workers. He avoided the question and now those people are left to fend for themselves and wait for a ruling which we are not all so confident will be in our favour.

This countervailing duty was initiated by the U.S. commerce department and the U.S. in this case, as in all other cases, is at the same time the judge, the prosecutor and the jury.

Given that my time is quickly running out, I would just like to make a few proposals of possible actions or remedies that could be taken by this government. There could be some rigorous inspection of American products crossing our border. What comes to mind readily is fruit and vegetables. There could be rigorous inspections to the point where the transport trucks would back up right down to the the Napa Valley in California. Talking about California, why not impose an import tax on California wines that are in direct competition with Canadian wines? Then the largest state in the United States would receive the same medicine that the U.S. commerce department is serving to us today.

Softwood Lumber

Second, Canada should embark on an aggressive promotional campaign of our softwood lumber and other forestry products in the United States. It should stress the quality of our paper and our fibre and it should underline the impact on home construction to Americans.

To this effect I received a press release today from the National Association of Home Builders, put out by its president, Mr. Robert Buchert and I quote him: "In the last two months we have seen prices soar over 30 per cent" and "As a result of the countervailing duty, home buyers will have to pay as much as \$1,000 more on an average priced new home". Then he calls the countervailing duty a protectionist measure.

Therefore, there is a possibility here that we could have the American public on our side.

Just to conclude, I still strongly believe that this is an unjustified provocation. It is an unfair trade practice which is totally contrary to the spirit of the free trade agreement. The Americans are interfering in our politics and we also differ very much on the interpretation of the words "free trade" as both definitions are not compatible at all. For the Americans it is a one way street leading straight to the United States.

To conclude, I would just like to say that this countervailing action, this harassment strikes directly at the core of rural Canada, which is all of northern Canada.

It directly affects the quality of life of 100,000 Canadians. These Canadians are only asking for job security. They want to earn a decent living in a dignified manner.

The least this government could do, with our support of course, is fight until we have used our last ounce of energy in order for ordinary Americans to benefit from the high quality of Canadian softwood lumber.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Pierre Blais (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture)): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in this debate this evening. I rise not only as minister, but more importantly as the member for the constituency of Bellechasse, which I have the honour to represent and in which there are hundreds and even thousands of jobs related to the forest industry which, over the years, has experienced some prosperity but which is now undergoing an important restructuring for various reasons. That restructuring, especially following the decision that we are dealing with now, could jeopardize many companies whose main operations are in my constituency as well as in other