

Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement

I am convinced that with the Free Trade Agreement, our epic is unfolding and the most brilliant feats are still to come for of all Canadians to see.

Mr. Réginald Bélair (Cochrane—Superior): Mr. Speaker, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on this historic Bill C-2 on behalf of my constituents in Cochrane-Superior, whom I thank for giving me their confidence on November 21.

Need I point out that this northern land is very welcoming; it is an ideal place to relax, to fish, to hunt, to go cross-country skiing or ice-fishing, etc. It has wide open spaces that ease the mind and challenge us to get to know nature better.

• (2140)

[*English*]

This great huge riding stretches from Hudson's Bay to the north shore of Lake Superior. Combined with the Kenora—Rainy River riding, they are more than half of Ontario. Indeed, we are on the map.

Before getting into the subject, let me just say that I would have preferred the witnessing of an agreement on the curbing of acid rain with its devastating effects on our forests and lakes. Some 14,000 lakes are already polluted in Canada.

There was some hope that the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) and President Reagan would have struck a deal at the Shamrock Summit in Québec. It flickered out when Reagan flashed the Free Trade Agreement in front of the Prime Minister's eyes. We all know that afterwards the environment was no longer a priority.

President-elect George Bush allotted a mere 10-second clip on the environment issue in 15 months of campaigning. There are some reasons to be alarmed because with the implementation of the Free Trade Agreement we stand to lose a lot of ground on this issue. With the Americans having unlimited access to our natural resources, and considering their low standard on the environment, one can seriously doubt the condition in which they would leave our land once they have exploited its richness.

The natives are also seriously concerned about the possible disruption of their hunting, trapping and fishing grounds. Like any other group of Canadians, they should have a say about the economic development of their regions as much as they have a right to control their own destiny.

[*Translation*]

The Mulroney-Reagan agreement, Mr. Speaker, refers many times to harmonizing the two nations. What does this mean? There is a significant imbalance between our two countries today. Canada has a just, humane, compassionate society. American society concentrates on profits, leaving aside the welfare of working men and women when it comes to wages and fringe benefits.

And what about the impact of the agreement on social programs? Let us just say that the Prime Minister told the *Financial Times* that unemployment insurance and social programs might be renegotiated in the coming years.

Which country do you think will adjust to the other, Mr. Speaker? Because the Americans are extremely rich in capital, since they have ten times the population we do, it is easy to see that we will end up subject to their influence and submitting to their demands. We will suffer this harmful influence because might will make right. It will be the law of the jungle.

Mr. Speaker, rest assured that I and all my colleagues in the Liberal Party will be extremely vigilant; we will speak up vigorously every time our Canadian workers are affected by job losses due to free trade. We will see to it that the benefits they have acquired over the last 40 years will be protected, in order to preserve and maintain family well-being.

It must be borne in mind, Mr. Speaker, that 40 per cent of our workers are unionized and the benefits and protection they have acquired since the 1930s must not be eroded over the coming years. We must keep in mind that nine American states have no minimum wage law and that twelve states have a minimum wage of three dollars an hour or less.

It is also easy to conclude that fringe benefits are not a priority for their political and economic leaders.

[*English*]

Regional development is also a great concern of mine. The DRIE program is now considered by the United States to be a subsidization program and, therefore, existing industries which wish to adjust to increasing competition are not eligible for government help.

In relation to the forestry industry, when one compounds such an action with the 15 per cent export tax on softwood lumber, sawmills across Canada find it extremely hard to remain competitive. Their profits are greatly reduced because of a substantial increase in