

Ottawa Journal by David Tilson MP ? U.S. imposes duties on softwood lumber

The U.S. Department of Commerce recently imposed countervailing duties as high as 24 per cent on Canadian softwood lumber imports.

This measure understandably raises serious concerns for the Canadian forestry industry and is yet, another example of the Liberal government's failure to take action to protect Canadian jobs and grow Canada's economy by failing to negotiate a new Softwood Lumber Agreement when it expired last fall. It's most unfortunate the current government's inaction of the last six months now places almost 400,000 Canadian jobs at risk.

Our previous Conservative government negotiated the Softwood Lumber Agreement by the end of April 2006, within just three months after coming into office, to solve the last softwood lumber dispute. It was also our previous Conservative government which negotiated an extension of the deal in 2012, to ensure market stability through to October 2016 when the agreement expired. We recognized the significant contribution the forestry sector makes to the Canadian economy, as it generates approximately 370,000 direct and indirect jobs in Canada. In 2014, 66 per cent of Canadian softwood exports were shipped to the U.S. Furthermore, 96 per cent of all softwood lumber imports into the U.S. are from Canada. Currently, Canada holds approximately 27 per cent of the U.S. market and the 2006 Softwood Lumber Agreement, negotiated by our previous Conservative government, capped the Canadian share at 34 per cent.

Instead of taking swift, decisive action to negotiate a new agreement like our previous Conservative government did when it came into office, the current Liberal government failed to take action last year and has now put whole communities that rely on the lumber industry at risk. The current government has a track record of failing to create jobs, grow the economy, and has now also failed forestry workers and their families, jeopardizing their livelihoods. Canadian forestry workers deserve stability and predictability from their government, which they haven't received from this Liberal government.

Sadly, negotiating a new softwood lumber agreement has never been a priority for the current Liberal government. In addition, there is no leadership and no mention of securing a new agreement in any of the Ministers' mandate letters. However, at this time last year, the current Liberal government proclaimed 'a real breakthrough on softwood lumber' with the previous U.S. administration and yet, we now face another softwood lumber crisis. What's worse is that the current government has pitted one region against another forcing some provinces to appoint their own U.S. envoys instead of demonstrating leadership on the issue.

The current Liberal government has once again failed to provide leadership to Canadians ? this time for forestry workers and their families through its inaction to negotiate a new softwood lumber agreement. The Canadian lumber industry should be able to count on the government to provide stability and predictability, but instead have received inaction, which has resulted in a crisis.

Canadians deserve better from their government.

