

Buy American - A Halton Hills Epic

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THE ISSUE: "Buy American" protectionism posed a serious threat to Canadian manufacturers and exporters. Local Canadian firms, such as Hayward Gordon, were being forced to lay off Canadian workers, and become an exporter of Canadian jobs! Multiplied by many thousands of municipalities across Canada, the problem faced by Halton Hills was rapidly becoming a national issue. The Americans slammed the door on Canadian trade while still bidding on Canadian infrastructure jobs.

Halton Hills Mayor Rick Bonnette had to act, and swiftly. (Once provoked, this Mayor's small frame quickly takes action of giant proportions). He believed it was time to show Canadian backbone, not Canadian back bacon.

ACTION TAKEN: Realizing that the Buy American action could if continued, erode all the benefits both the United States and Canada had enjoyed from the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Mayor Bonnette and Halton Hills Councillors appealed to fellow civic leaders through organizations such as the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. On June 6, 2009 they adopted Halton Hills' resolution supporting open and free trade. Also, with the cooperation of Mayor Victor Fedeli of North Bay, a grassroots Mayor to Mayor Campaign

was launched last October. This campaign reminded the Mayors of United States cities and towns where Canadians traditionally had made large purchases that punitive action like Buy American could end up cutting two ways.

Mayor Bonnette further took his campaign to Ottawa, where he summed up the problem in a major speech to a non-partisan symposium hosted by many Federal MP's.

The harm that Buy American initiative could do to cross-border trade spread across both countries, until the Chamber of Commerce of the United States of America took notice, and addressed a warning to Washington of the unintended harm such a program could do to U.S. interests.

A groundswell of opinion arose in Canada, and was evidenced by a massive media response to the action started by Mayor Rick Bonnette and his councillors. From mighty press voices like the Toronto Star all the way to the Town of Conception Bay South in Newfoundland came cries of alarm!

THE RESOLUTION: On April 20, 2009, the Corporation of the Town of Halton Hills passed a Resolution to sum up the problems faced by both Canada and the United States presented by the Buy American initiative, and reaffirmed Halton Hills' support of free trade.

Said Resolution further supported the efforts of the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters Association in their quest to have the United States Congress "reconsider and repeal" the Buy American requirements for the United States stimulus packages.

THE OUTCOME: The Government of Canada on February 5, 2010, agreed in principle to exempt Canadian companies from Buy American restrictions. Ottawa's stance was loudly applauded by the Federation of Canadian Manufacturers.

Halton Hills, through the action of Mayor Rick Bonnette, with the full support of local Council, received a great deal of publicity: There were forty-four radio interviews, including one with Rex Murphy, and another with Anna Marie Tremonti of CBC. The BBC asked Rick Bonnette for an interview. Newspapers across Canada, one from Japan, and major United States papers like the Washington Post, Wall Street Journal and the New York Times all featured the Halton Hills' response to Buy American.

It was not all plain sailing! Canadian pipe was ripped out of an installation in Camp Pendleton, California, so that "made in U.S" pipe could take its place. Mayor David Miller in Toronto was not supportive. John Hayward



of Hayward Gordon was seriously considering moving his facilities stateside at the expense of workers in Canada. For the most part, however, Rick Bonnette's forthright approach to the problem, and the widespread support afforded his efforts, paid off handsomely.

(As this article goes to press, Rick Bonnette has not announced whether he will run again as Mayor of Halton Hills. If he does, this writer will be sure to support him.)

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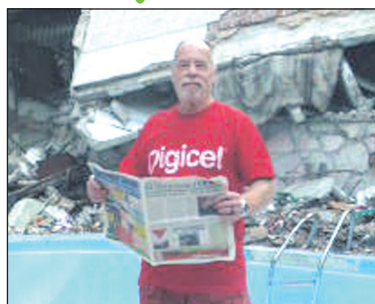
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