

'Buy American' deal reached, but reaction mixed

By **LISA TALLYN**
Staff Writer

A tentative Canada-United States procurement deal intended to help Canadian companies get around the protectionist wall thrown up by recession-battered Americans is being considered a positive step locally.

Under the agreement, Canadian suppliers will be provided access to state and local public works projects under the Recovery Act in a range of areas, including programs of the U.S. Department of Energy, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and Environmental Protection Agency, said Wellington-Halton Hills MP Michael Chong, who welcomes the agreement.

He said those are areas of procurement where Canadian companies have traditionally been suppliers or sub-contractors in the United States.

In exchange, Canada is giving American firms access to billions of dollars in contracts by provincial governments, and in some cases, municipalities.

"It's a step forward with this agreement," said Halton Hills Mayor Rick Bonnette, who has been a driving

force in the fight against the "Buy American" ban, which prevented Canadian companies from participating in American infrastructure projects.

"(It) isn't just about a trade deal, it's about people. It's about protecting Canadian workers, families, businesses and communities. These folks are hurting from the downturn and they need to know that all governments are working together to create jobs and give their communities a fair chance to compete. The progress we're seeing today is a product of that kind of co-operation," said Bonnette.

He said the agreement will allow Canadian companies to eventually be able to bid on infrastructure contracts.

He cautioned, however, that "the devil is in the details" of the deal, which aren't fully known yet. He added as well that there are only about 10 days left before the U.S. economic stimulus package expires.

"The Americans ragged the puck



JOHN HAYWARD

and ran out the clock," he said.

He stressed the announcement is a reminder that all three levels of government must work together to meet Canada's economic challenges.

John Hayward, president of Hayward Gordon Ltd., and who brought the "Buy American" issue to Halton Hills council last April, said the deal is "definitely a step forward."

"But this agreement's short-term value to many Canadian companies damaged over the past year by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) is very low. The hope is that a precedent has been set with the granting of a Canadian exemption on ARRA," said Hayward.

"Longer term it could be extremely valuable or a total failure, but we don't really know yet, however, it's a chance we have to take," said Hayward.

"Nobody should assume this issue is solved, this is a first step and there's much more to do," he added.

Hayward said he was grateful to Halton Hills council, and especial-

ly Bonnette and Councillor Clark Somerville, for "their courage to recognize and act upon a conviction."

"The impact the Town of Halton Hills has on this international trade issue is breathtaking—possibly the most important one for Canada in over 15 years," said Hayward.

Chong called the agreement "crucial to protecting Canadian jobs and workers in Halton Hills."

"Our government worked hard to defend the interests of Canadian workers and Canadian companies," said Chong.

He also commended Bonnette "for his deep commitment to seeing this issue resolved in a fashion that would not negatively affect our community's business interests."

Helen MacCormack, president of Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce, said the agreement "represents an important step forward in our continued engagement with our largest trading partner."

"While more work needs to be done to counter protectionism in the United States, this agreement has placed us in a better position than our main competitors to receive U.S. stimulus funding," said MacCormack.

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