

# Foreign workers may be taking jobs away from Mainers

By Monica Pettengill

*Editor's note: The following story appeared on the front page of last week's St. John Valley Times. For some unknown reason, it was never continued on page 4, as originally intended. Instead, portions of the Van Buren fire story were continued twice.*

*As soon as we realized the error, we posted this entire story on our web site, www.sjvalley-times.com.*

*We apologize for any confusion this may have caused.*

*In any case, here is the entire story as it should have appeared in last week's edition.*

**FORT KENT** – Are bonded foreign workers taking jobs away from Americans? That could be the case in our forests.

Gov. John Baldacci, Congressman Mike Michaud,

Maine Senator Troy Jackson, and Representative John Martin were just a few of the well-known faces that appeared at a forum and job fair for loggers held at the University of Maine on Saturday.

The topic that had everyone talking was the federal labor certification process that allows bonded foreign workers to be employed in the U.S. when no U.S. workers are available.

Maine workers who make their living in the woods were on hand to express their concerns and ask questions about the H2A process that, according to Jackson, some people find is keeping Maine people from being able to work.

Jackson said the purpose of the forum was to let the Department of Labor, in charge of enforcing the foreign labor laws, know that there

are people who have expensive equipment who can't afford to work for the rates being paid to foreign workers.

Martin said the forum could help to find ways to tighten the program to make sure Maine residents get the jobs first.

Martin said he and Jackson had been talking about the forum for loggers for about three months.

The issues with the program, however, have been around for a long time.

Jackson said it is nearly the 10-year anniversary of when the subject was last being discussed in this area.

Baldacci told the audience, "Maine loggers are a part of the rich tradition of the state."

"Those who work in this industry are hard working people who

simply want a fair shot at a good job," he continued.

"I'm concerned they are not getting that fair shot right now."

The concerns of the loggers who attended the meeting included, not only losing jobs to foreign workers, but also having to provide expensive equipment in order to take a job, or being forced to take a job that does not pay enough to survive on and to pay for the costs of using personal equipment or travelling.

Baldacci said before employers can get approval to hire foreign workers in Maine, they have to show that they've made every effort to hire Maine workers first.

He explained there are state and federal laws that are supposed to make sure that happens, and he told

the audience that they were going to step up efforts to use and enforce those laws.

"We need to make sure that you have a level playing field," Baldacci told attendees.

Both the state and federal governments were represented at the forum.

Workshops were held throughout the day to give loggers an opportunity to voice their concerns.

In addition to voicing their concerns, woods workers were also exposed to more than 400 jobs in the industry that they could apply for that day via computers set up in Nadeau Hall and with individuals present to assist in the application process.

## Bill would resolve northern Maine labor dispute

**ST. JOHN VALLEY**– Gov. John Baldacci recently introduced emergency legislation to address issues that are keeping Maine workers from jobs in the North Maine Woods.

"Getting people back to work has to be our top priority," Baldacci said.

"While concerns about the wages and the concentration of land ownership in Northern Maine remain, the current law is actually preventing people from working. That's not acceptable."

Baldacci traveled to Fort Kent

one Saturday and discussed the issue with loggers and has been working with State Rep. John Martin and Sen. Troy Jackson to resolve the issues.

The bill would repeal the law that requires large landowners to bargain with forest harvesters and haulers to set wage rates for their services.

It also tightens requirements that companies that hire foreign bond workers must own the equipment used by those workers.

Under the legislation, the Department of Conservation

would assist the Department of Labor in efforts to enforce the law, operators of equipment would be required to carry and produce proof of ownership and the penalty for violations of the law would triple.

The bill also lists a number of actions that the Maine Department of Labor and the U.S. Department of Labor will take to ensure Maine workers are treated fairly for employment and that all rules pertaining to visas for foreign workers are strictly followed.

## NB government offers Fraser some support

**MADAWASKA** – The government of New Brunswick has offered to increase Fraser Papers' wood allocation 9 percent to 20 percent in an effort to help boost the sulphite mill in Edmundston and prevent job loss.

The government has also offered to amend long-term

agreements that could result in a \$6.5 million saving annually.

Last week, Fraser said it would not reopen the sulphite mill unless its wood, electricity and labor costs were reduced there. That is the agreement the government has offered to amend.

The closure would cost 200 of

the mill's 450 jobs.

The company is facing hard times due to a weak demand for paper products, the high Canadian dollar and U.S. subsidies, it reported last week.

The province's offer to Fraser does not ensure the mill's reopening.

## 4 elected to school board, board of selectmen

**MADAWASKA** – Out of 3,178 registered voters in Madawaska, 125 showed up to vote last Tuesday.

Both the board of selectmen and the school committee had

two vacant seats with two candidates running to fill those seats.

For the board of selectmen, Mike Williams received 106 votes and Ivan Fletcher

received 112.

For the school committee, Walter Desrosier received 115 votes and incumbent Yves Dube received 106 votes.

## Fort Kent VNA moves to Pump House Rd.

**FORT KENT** – The Visiting Nurses of Aroostook Fort Kent office has moved to 10 Pump

House Road, next to the Knights of Columbus Hall.

The telephone and fax numbers remain the same, as does the

mailing address.

An open house is planned for later this summer.

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