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Rep. Martin advances forest workers' bill

AUGUSTA — Rep. John Martin, (D-Eagle Lake), presented a bill in January to improve employment opportunities for Maine workers in the forest industry, by cracking down on landowners who hire Canadian workers, over residents.

"I've been around for a long time and the use of bonded laborers from Canada in the forest industry continues to this day," said Martin. "My role as a legislator is to protect the people of northern Maine and I'm trying to level the playing field. People from Canada come to work in Maine,

but try to find a job in Canada and see how far you'd get."

LD 1552, which Martin presented to the Legislature's Labor Committee, would require a landowner to notify the State's Bureau of Forestry if forest land is harvested using bonded labor under the federal bonded labor program. This program allows U.S. employers to hire Canadian loggers if certain criteria, such as a shortage of resident labor, are met.

Landowners using bonded labor or landowners failing to provide the required notification would not be allowed to participate in the

Maine Tree Growth program, which gives landowners tax incentives for managing land in active timber production.

In his prepared testimony, Martin asked why people who are not from Maine should benefit over Maine workers. Cross-border tensions over hiring Canadian workers instead of American workers date back several decades and there have been numerous

complaints that firms are violating laws to make it appear a shortfall of American workers exists so they can hire Canadian workers.

The Labor Committee recently also heard a similar bill, sponsored by Sen. Troy Jackson that would prohibit an employer from hiring foreign laborers for five years if the employer violates the required proof of equipment ownership or foreign labor certification laws.

Video

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included — from kayaking to cross country skiing. There's a special

transmit statewide — both the films Brenda and Alan Jepson make with her students and the films they make on their own.

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