

# Senate shoots down bill to protect loggers, Jackson undaunted

By **Tory Bonenfant**  
**Managing Editor**

**FORT KENT** - Maine Sen. Troy Jackson continues to fight for Maine loggers this week after his bill, which would have compelled contractors to notify the government when hiring foreign bonded workers under a federal bonded labor law, was voted down by the Senate on April 11.

Because of his concerns with the bill and other pieces of legislation, Jackson held a meeting Sunday, April 17 at Rock's Diner on Main Street to hear from people concerned about potential changes to the logging industry. About 40 people attended the meeting, Jackson said.

"They were pretty upset with everything that happened last week, and the comments on the house floor, saying that Maine people didn't want to work - that fired people up pretty good," Jackson said Monday, April 18.

The comments referred to were issued by Maine Rep. Peter Rioux (R-Winterport) on the house floor, according to Troy Haines (D - Mapleton), chair of the Aroostook County Democrats, who said in a telephone interview on Monday afternoon that Rioux had also sent him an "official apology," stating that he'd had no intention of insulting Maine loggers. Haines also mentioned that Maine Rep. Bernard Ayotte (R-Caswell) was "in the right place" on the issue, although he is a Republican.

LD 314, "An Act to Improve Employment Opportunities for Workers in the Forest Industry," would have eliminated an existing tax break incentive to forest



**Troy Jackson**

owners who hire foreign labor over Maine workers if it had passed, according to a press release.

During a "vigorous" floor debate, Jackson, who is the Democratic lead on the Labor, Commerce, Research and Economic Development Committee said, "It's a poke in the eye to watch Canadian trucks drive by my house on their way to Canadian mills, with Maine lumber while my neighbors sit at home unemployed," according to a press release. He went on to ask, "Do we really want to be giving tax breaks supporting the hiring of Canadian workers over Maine workers? It is my job to protect the people of Aroostook County, many of whom happen to be unemployed loggers."

Jackson issued a public letter last week, in which he stated that he paid close attention to any legislation that may jeopardize the working environment for Maine Woods workers.

In a 21-14 vote, the Democratic caucus voted in support of LD 314. The law as proposed and amended would have required a landowner to notify the Department of Conservation, Bureau of Forestry if the forest land is harvested using bonded labor under the federal H2 bonded labor program. If a landowner or a harvester uses bonded labor, or if the landowner fails to provide the required notification, the land must be suspended from the Maine Tree Growth Tax Law for the year in which bonded labor is used and a penalty must be assessed under the commercial forestry excise tax to compensate the state for the General Fund.

Jackson, who has been a logger for 20 years, noted on the Senate floor that out of the 77,000 acres in Allagash, 72,000 of those acres are in designated tree growth areas.

For every million "board feet," a measurement of lumber volume, that is exported to Canada, 13.7 full time jobs are lost to Maine workers and it is estimated that between 350 and 500 million "board feet" is exported to Canada at the St. Pamphile, Que. point of entry, according to the press release from the Maine Senate Democratic Office. A conservative estimate of jobs lost annually is between 4,795 and

6,850 jobs, the press release added.

Still in the legislative hopper "of particular concern to me in this session is a bill that completely undoes protections for Maine woods workers," Jackson wrote in public letter published on his legislative website. State Sen. Tom Saviello (R-Wilton) has proposed a bill, LD 1383, "An Act To Improve the Process by Which Logging Contractors Hire Legal Foreign Workers," Jackson said, that would make it easier for Maine companies to hire foreign labor.

"For years, I have worked with my colleagues to bring some semblance of fairness to a working situation that is inherently unfair, and this bill would roll back much of the progress we have made," Jackson said in the letter.

"I helped pass legislation in the last legislative session to help woods workers. The intent of that legislation, which is the current

law, was to help manage the flow of foreign workers in Maine," Jackson added. "We sought to provide guidance for companies and workers alike. The law does not prohibit the use of foreign workers, it simply sets reasonable guidelines. My concerns with the proposed legislation are that we will take a step backwards."

Jackson said on Monday that May 6 is the hearing date for the logging bill, and that people from the St. John Valley may go down to Augusta to voice their concerns on the bill.

"They've gone to Augusta in the past," Jackson said. "If they hadn't said (the people of Maine) were so lazy, they might not have had to go down there."

Jackson also added that, for those unable to attend the meeting in Fort Kent and who had concerns, he could be reached 436-0763 or by email at jacksonforsenate@hotmail.com.

## Sexual Assault Services will offer informational evening at university

**FORT KENT** - AMHC Sexual Assault Services will be available on the University of Maine at Fort Kent campus from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Tuesday, April 26, to provide information about sexual assault prevention to faculty and students in recognition of Sexual Assault Awareness

Month. At 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, April 27, the university will again partner with SAS for an informative evening at the Bengal's Lair at UMFK, with a live band, for students and faculty who want to learn more about preventing sexual violence. For more information, call 834-3186 or 728-3304.

## CORRECTION

In reference to last week's story on the Lions Prom, food served will be included in the price of the ticket.

To notify us of a news error, please call 728-3336 or email [tory.bonenfant@sjvalley-times.com](mailto:tory.bonenfant@sjvalley-times.com)

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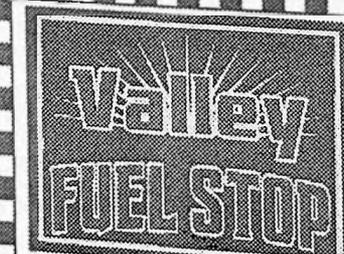


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