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Canada, Copenhagen
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Government Compass-“your guide to where Canada is headed”



“Buy American” Success – A win for Harper? (and Canadian Construction)

Rt. Hon Stephen Harper and Minister of International Trade Peter Van Loan had an enormous win in early February with the announcement of the exemption of Canadian firms in a protectionist “Buy American Deal” passed by the U.S House of Representatives earlier in 2009. This means that Canadian firms now can bid on Infrastructure program projects and the supply of materials and fabrication components in 37 of 50 U.S States.

This victory for the Government of Canada works both ways - American firms now have access to municipal infrastructure projects in our country. Either way, it is anticipated that the deal will be a boon for construction and our members.

This deal really is a sub-national procurement deal which solidifies the validity of NAFTA and favoured status for Canada in dealing with the Obama Administration. Now, to be fair and balanced, the Opposition parties are saying it is too little, too late – meaning most of the stimulus money in the U.S has been either

allocated or spent as outlined on www.recovery.gov.

According to that site more than 565,000 self reported jobs have been created and 75 billion in paid construction contracts.

Is this deal a precedent setter or a one off victory? Probably a little bit of both.

So what does it mean for us? It means more contractors will potentially be bidding on municipal infrastructure jobs as part of the Canadian Economic Action Plan. It means opportunity to sign new contractors as Building Trades partners and it means your members could have access to a larger share of the work.

Some of the contractors from the United States are used to dealing in a unionized environment under both statewide and project labour agreements. We need to use this opportunity to grow our business and represent more construction workers in the marketplace. In the short term, and simply put, these contractors will arrive looking for a ready made workforce – this could be a

top down organizing opportunity.

Some other Canadian labour unions have come out swinging saying this deal puts Canadian companies and Canadian operations at risk. When was the last time groups like CUPE had anything to do with building something for a municipality or the Federal Government? CUPE may think they are carrying the torch for Canada – but Canada is inextricably linked to our largest trading partner. Our construction jobs are best defended by us not self-appointed experts at CUPE, even if they are supposed to be our friend.