

## De Jong thinks 'for himself'

**Maurice Bridge**

Vancouver Sun

*Friday, October 07, 2005*

A straight-talking Surrey sawmill operator describes provincial Labour Minister Mike de Jong as a good choice to handle the government's side of the dispute with the province's teachers.

"This is not a fight the government would pick, but it's not a fight the government can walk away from," said David Gray, owner of Mill and Timber, "I think they've got the right guy."

Gray's experience with de Jong dates from de Jong's tenure as forests minister between 2001 and 2004. As co-chair of the Free Trade Lumber Council, Gray had plenty of opportunity to watch the minister perform under pressure.

"He's in what I would call almost a no-win situation," Gray said Thursday.

"We know how the teachers are going to play it out, we know that they're going to play their cards in a certain way, and it doesn't matter what you say, it isn't going to make a lot of difference.

"Given those circumstances, though, my sense is that he will be good, he will be considerate," Gray said.

He added he does not expect de Jong simply to act as a government enforcer in the dispute.

"He's much more thoughtful than that. Anything he does, I will give him credit for it being thought through."

De Jong also gets credit for clear thinking from Dave Haggard, another forest-industry player, but one less similar ideologically.

"I think he is his own thinker, but on the other hand, he's going to [follow] the policies of the government, and I don't see them capitulating very easily," said Haggard, a former national president of the International Woodworkers Union.

Haggard says de Jong always had an open door for the union.

"He was never of the mind not to listen to us with new ideas and new thinking," he said.

"In fairness to him, I think he did try to find some compromise with us in the forest industry when we were going through some tough changes on tenure and all that stuff, but at the end of the day, I'm not sure we got there."

De Jong has had more than a decade in provincial politics. He was practising law in Abbotsford when he ran for the Liberals in a 1994 byelection in Matsqui, and was re-elected in 1996, 2001 and 2005 as MLA for Abbotsford-Mount Lehman.

He was deputy house leader for the official opposition and acted as critic for a number of

portfolios, but forestry and labour have been his two big jobs in cabinet.

Another person who dealt with him directly during his forestry days is Rick Jeffrey, CEO of Coast Forest Products Association and former head of the B.C. Truck Loggers Association, who recalls him as "very intelligent, careful and measured."

"In the circumstances he is facing, he will do what's best for the province and the students, and he will not be pressured by the union and their tactics," Jeffrey said.

Jeffrey has nothing but praise for the way de Jong introduced necessary change to the forest industry, which has a history of resisting government initiatives.

mbridge@png.canwest.com

Profile of Mike de Jong.

© The Vancouver Sun 2005

CLOSE WINDOW

---

Copyright © 2005 CanWest Interactive, a division of [CanWest Global Communications Corp.](#) All rights reserved.  
Optimized for browser versions 4.0 and higher.

