

Oral Questions

because under American trade law article 301 requests the approval of the President before acting.

We would like to know from this government if it has discussed that with the President of the United States and if it has received any commitment from the United States that it would not close down the softwood industry in Canada from sea to sea?

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Industry, Science and Technology and Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister has said, he did discuss it with the President. I have discussed it on a number of occasions with the U.S. trade representative, with the Secretary of Commerce. It is our best judgement that there will not be a 301 response.

We believe that there could be other responses designed to get the trade and softwood lumber products on to a normal trade basis. There are no guarantees in this business, but our best judgement is that there will not be a 301, and that is the basis on which we moved when we announced our intentions.

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AGRICULTURE

Mr. John Harvard (Winnipeg St. James): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister.

Canadian farmers are still looking for straight answers from this government on the crucial issue of emergency assistance. When the Minister of Agriculture was in Rosetown, Saskatchewan, attending a protest rally he said nothing about this issue, but after the rally he told the media that he had no intention of providing emergency aid to farmers. He has never been that blunt on the floor of the House of Commons.

Farmers want the truth and they want it now. It is time that this government showed some integrity on the issue and gave a straight answer. What is it?

Hon. Charles Mayer (Minister of Western Economic Diversification and Minister of State (Grains and Oilseeds)): Mr. Speaker, we have been meeting with farmers. There is a meeting at the end of the week in Winnipeg, in fact it starts today, the Third Line of Defence Committee, to assess the problem. We are going to wait until that committee comes with its report.

The other question that farmers are asking is that if we want to help farmers keep some income, why did that member's party vote against sending people back to work, which would keep grain flowing in international markets?

Mr. John Harvard (Winnipeg St. James): Mr. Speaker, my question again is for the Prime Minister. His government likes to talk about what the government has done for farmers, but there is one fact it never mentions and that fact is that last year alone it slashed payments to farmers by more than \$1 billion and that was a time when grain was plummeting to new lows.

Farmers are wanting back what has been taken away from them. They want fairness and only a callous government would not understand that.

I want to know what this government is going to do today.

Hon. Charles Mayer (Minister of Western Economic Diversification and Minister of State (Grains and Oilseeds)): Mr. Speaker, I do not think that farmers view this government as being callous when it comes to dealing with farmers. The amount of support that we have provided for farmers has been a record amount and most farmers know that, but we also know as a government and farmers know that there is no amount of money that is going to solve this problem for good. The real solution is going to come if we can get some sanity back into international trade patterns. We are working very hard on that. In the meantime, we are going to do the very best we can, as I have said before, to support our farmers to get to through this very difficult time.

I would suggest that if all of us want to support our farmers, and the indication in the House is that we all want to support them, we should support legislation to put grain handlers back to work so that we can see that our grain continues to flow so that farmers have income.

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UNEMPLOYMENT

Mr. Steven W. Langdon (Essex—Windsor): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Finance.

The Economic Council today released studies that show that unemployment has been getting worse in Canada, that it has been hurting people for longer periods and that it has been falling harder on poor regions and groups in our country. Yet, yesterday, the Governor the Bank of Canada in Montreal argued that