

Oral Questions

do the job and where the hon. gentleman might be of some help—

Mr. Peterson: Do not flounder.

Mr. Crosbie: I say, might be of some help, if he brought the message to those who need to hear it. That is the public and the governments of the 12 nation states that make up the European Community. There is still much work to be done. I will be inviting him to join delegations to Europe this year. We are waging a campaign to try to sway public opinion in those countries. He will be invited to come along and do his share rather than simply expostulating in the House of Commons in a manner that is not really going to achieve very much.

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[*Translation*]

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Mr. Réginald Bélair (Cochrane—Superior): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Deputy Prime Minister.

Yesterday, we heard that three U.S. senators more or less suggested that the Canadian government could drop the countervail on softwood lumber if it would allow exports of Canadian logs to the United States. Do the Deputy Prime Minister and his government not think it is high time Canada took a firm stand and turned down this pretentious offer from the Americans, who would like to see us export our logs whole to the United States?

[*English*]

Hon. Frank Oberle (Minister of Forestry): Mr. Speaker, I have answered this question twice before in Question Period. Were it not for the clear position we have had in the past, the American senators would not ask to have it changed. We could not be more firm in our position in this regard.

I want, however, to point out to my hon. friend that there is presently a trade in logs which is both ways. Some of the mills in the maritime provinces depend on raw materials that they import from the United States under an arrangement of special permits.

There are small quantities of logs that are sold out of British Columbia that are surplus to our needs. One would assume that two reasonable neighbours would continue those arrangements. But for the wholesale opening and export of raw materials, be it logs, minerals, or anything else from Canada, the answer is no and it will remain that way.

Mr. Maurice Foster (Algoma): Mr. Speaker, my question is a supplementary for the same minister.

As the minister knows, the 14 per cent countervail duty on softwood lumber is having a devastating impact on softwood lumber mills in northern Ontario. Some 328 mills across the country are supposed to be exempt from this duty because they purchase their timber on the open market or in some cases, in my constituency, they purchase their timber in the United States. One company alone is going to pay over \$1 million countervail duty this year.

When is the minister going to take responsibility and ensure that the United States recognizes these exemptions because the timber is being purchased on the open market or in some cases in the United States and have this countervail duty removed. Surely what is going on now is totally unfair.

Hon. Frank Oberle (Minister of Forestry): Mr. Speaker, I answered a similar question yesterday. The pain has been eased somewhat by the fact that there has been a very significant increase in lumber prices over the last three months which has cushioned to a large extent the effect of the renewed imposition of the countervail duty.

I should, however, point out to my friend that we are painfully aware of the specific circumstances which he describes. We had asked for the exemption under the new arrangement and the commerce department or the panel dealing with the issue simply refused to look at it on the grounds that there was not sufficient time.

I can tell my hon. friend that this issue is being addressed in a very special and aggressive way with the United States. We are hoping to get a solution to this problem in the event that the larger issue cannot be resolved right away.