

Will the government agree to the recommendation of the committee that there be an ambassador for circumpolar affairs so that we can give real priority to the common border that we hold with Russia in the hope that it will become a fully peaceful, denuclearized, demilitarized border in the basis of the relations of our two countries?

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Mr. Speaker, in exactly the same way I answered the first question, I think that is a valid point the hon. member raises and is something that ought to be discussed.

In respect to the first question, I have subsequently been informed that Canada's view is that Russia should establish a timetable for the swift removal of its forces from that area. We will be making that representation and asking Mr. Yeltsin what the timetable is and encouraging it to be as short as possible.

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MEME BREAST IMPLANTS

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Acting Prime Minister.

[*Translation*]

Today it was reported that in January 1989, a senior official of the Department of National Health and Welfare wanted to take the Meme implant off the market for further testing. Mr. Speaker, this was in 1989, it was a senior official, and he felt it was urgent at the time. Women's health was at stake but the government did nothing. Why did the government decide to ignore these warnings at the time?

[*English*]

Mrs. Barbara Sparrow (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, the report to which the hon. member is referring from the health protection branch is not the whole story.

The Meme implant was reviewed both intensively and very much had the total research and investigation done. The whole department was included. Indeed I can tell

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the member that there was a conclusive report with regard to the Meme implant.

I would also like to say that the CMA back in 1991 did a specific review that was arm's length from the government. It did not come forward with any scientific evidence to prove it was not safe.

The health of women—the health of all Canadians—in this specific issue comes first and foremost. We will always stand behind that.

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, with a government that says it really, truly believes that the health of women should come first and foremost, I would like to ask why it took three years to act on the advice of a senior bureaucrat that the Meme implant should be removed until further study.

Furthermore, I would like to ask the spokesperson for the department why a senior member of that department would dismiss today, as quoted in the newspapers, women's health issues and the Meme transplant controversy by saying: "It sells papers. It is a women's issue". It is a women's issue. It is a women's health issue.

I want to ask this government why it did not take it seriously in the past? Why in fact did the chair of its own panel in 1992 say today that she had not received all of that information? How can this country and Canadian women have any faith that this government is going to put women's health issues first?

• (1450)

Mrs. Barbara Sparrow (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, Dr. Baines has received and has full access to all the documentation within the department. Women's health and women's safety do come first.

With regard to the remarks that the hon. leader of the NDP quoted from the paper, "it sells, it is a women's issue", I absolutely apologize. If what that department person said is true, I apologize on behalf of the minister, myself and everybody on this side of the House. It is unacceptable.