

Oral Questions

Hon. Herb Gray (Windsor West): Mr. Speaker, why won't the minister admit, in the face of this latest example of harassment by the U.S. authorities of Canadian manufactured exports to the United States, that the free trade agreement, in spite of what he says, when it comes to Canadian interests is simply not working; it is a flop?

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Industry, Science and Technology and Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, during the time the free trade agreement has been in place, we have seen the trade surplus of Canada with the United States increase from \$14.2 billion to \$17.5 billion. We have seen our exports increase by \$8 billion, about 7.5 per cent. We saw an all-time record high of exports in August of last year. Surely that is an indication the free trade agreement is not hurting but helping Canadian exporters.

I remind the hon. member that before the free trade agreement was in place, we did not have recourse to judicial practices where we could go to the chapter 19 dispute settlement mechanism. Now if we have disputes, we have a legal basis on which we can protest them.

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BREAST IMPLANTS

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Burnaby): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the minister of health said that he was still waiting for evidence that silicone breast implants were unsafe.

I wonder if he is aware of what is going on within his own department. Staff within the Health Protection Branch have been instructed to cut and paste company supplied data on this issue and that is how decisions are being made. Those who have objected to this process have either been silenced or sacked.

Will the minister now take this issue seriously, order an independent inquiry where all of the evidence can be presented, looked at and a reasonable decision made on behalf of Canadian women and the health of Canadian women?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, in my previous answers, I referred to processes established in the department of health to deal with medical devices. I must mention, as I told the same hon. member yesterday, that we also set up a register to which women who have had a breast implant can refer to give information concerning their reaction or their level of satisfaction with the implant.

Second, within the department, I asked the deputy minister to implement a process for a thorough review not only of breast implants but of all medical devices that are used. Mr. Speaker, I think that these measures will keep us up to date and ensure that the policies of the department of health take account of women's health, especially in this case—the health of women who for their own reasons decided to proceed with the operation.

Accordingly, I met with Marcella Tardif yesterday. I talked with her at length about this subject and I think that we are doing what can be done. I repeat what I said earlier: If I have any doubt whatever about the advisability of allowing silicone breast implants back on the market, no one, including the hon. member, will again see these breast implants on the market in Canada.

[*English*]

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Burnaby): Mr. Speaker, that is a long answer but it is not an independent inquiry. It does not address the issue of taking company supplied data from Dow-Corning, cutting and pasting it and using it as departmental evidence.

If the minister will not agree to an independent inquiry, will he at least refer this issue to the status of women subcommittee of the House of Commons and ensure that all of his departmental staff who are asked to appear do appear on this critical issue?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I have no objection to considering the request to refer the case to the committee on the status of women. In general, officials of the department of health who are called to testify before committees do so. Now, again, I prefer to consider the request and see, because the committees have mecha-