

Women entrepreneurs best bet to boost exports

I take issue with your editorial of Sept. 20 ("Grrl Trade Mission") on the recent announcement by International Trade Minister Sergio Marchi that he will lead a women's trade mission to the United States in November.

Your editorial was critical of the initiative, "leaving aside the basic and important question" of why government should assist Canadian exporters in the first place.

Given the importance of women-owned and -operated firms to our economy, this is to take the whole issue completely out of context.

Let's at least get the question right: if it is the stated goal of the government of Canada to "double the number of

exporters," and if it is the mandate of the minister for International Trade to assist Canadian companies to pursue export opportunities, then why the focus on women, and why to the United States?

Simple.

Small- and medium-sized enterprises are the largest source of new job growth in Canada, and are specially targeted for export assistance by the federal government.

One-third of this nation's firms are owned or operated by women, providing jobs for nearly two million Canadians.

Businesses led by women create jobs at a rate four times the national

average, and projections indicate there will be 680,000 self-employed women in Canada by the year 2000.

Yet these women-owned and -operated businesses are under-represented at trade fairs and on trade missions to the United States, our most lucrative trading partner.

We want the federal government to take special steps to remedy that situation.

Why Washington?

Seventy-five per cent of the world's multinational enterprises are represented in the Washington Mid-Atlantic region. The area has the second-largest concentration of high-tech firms outside of California's Sil-

icon Valley, 60 of the Fortune 500 have their headquarters there and there are 7,500 of the country's largest professional associations in the city.

It's called targeted marketing, and it's such a successful formula that we have the Royal Bank as a major corporate sponsor of the mission.

We salute Minister Marchi, the Canadian Embassy in Washington and the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade for leading on this important economic issue.

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