



Grrl trade mission

The world of commerce, a federal cabinet minister announced this week, "is not necessarily a man's world." So Trade Minister Sergio Marchi has boldly announced he will lead a Team Canada trade mission of women entrepreneurs to Washington later this year.

May we, at the risk of seeming out of step with the times, express a polite note of wonderment at this curious announcement?

Leaving aside for the moment the basic and important question of why government should coddle any business ventures abroad, we wish to focus here on the question why it must make a special point of providing guidance for women entrepreneurs? Their basic helplessness to do things themselves, perhaps? A politician as smooth as Mr. Marchi would never be so maladroit as to put it that way, of course, but is there some other explanation?

We also wonder why, if our federal government must run an organized tour of this sort,

does it feel compelled to provide its protective umbrella for a trip to Washington, of all places? America's well-known penchant for treating women the way Saudi Arabia does, maybe?

And finally, if the gender thing really is of such fundamental importance, why is this mission being led by a middle-aged Italian-Canadian male? It would be just conceivable, if this mission were to somewhere like Saudi Arabia, that a male leader would be needed both to get the delegates admitted to official audiences and also to set an example to their foreign counterparts of someone taking women entrepreneurs seriously. Neither of these reasons can possibly be thought to operate with respect to the United States. The real explanation couldn't be rank politicking while a conference of women entrepreneurs was in town, could it?

In any case our advice is simple: Sisters of the world! Throw off these paternalistic shackles. In a free market, government doesn't dash ahead and fling open the door for you.