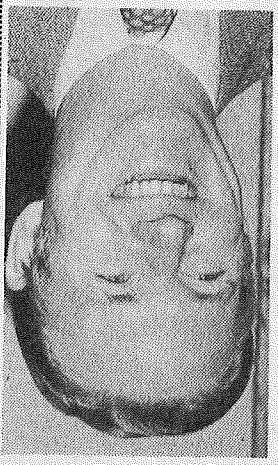


Feds plan to put 'flesh on skeleton'



TONY ABBOTT

Recent federal initiatives aimed at improving services to small businesses were sought in the business community that sector of the economy the government's desire to act, not as a hindrance, but in a positive, supportive way, Mississauga MP Tony Abbott told delegates to the Enterprise Canada 77 conference at the Skyline Hotel Monday.

But while injecting a note of cautious optimism in his luncheon address, the Minister of State for Small Business painted a dismal picture of the current Canadian economic climate. The problem, he said, "isn't one of cyclical instability"; it is a "harsh fact" that in recent years a number of fundamental developments have eroded the ability of Canadian industries to compete, he said.

"The Canadian cost structure has been seriously inflated through upward pressures on labor prices, equipment costs and other factors, without fully compensating gains in productivity", he said.

Many firms, he said, reported an insufficient supply of trained people and our task is to put flesh on this skeleton. And it's my hope that we can eliminate the negatives and accentuate the positives.

The Enterprise Canada 77 program, he told the luncheon, serves to define those areas where programs, services and regulations can be improved. The rates were blamed by many firms.

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