

Confidential memo leaked

MP hungers for controversy

Mississauga - Federal Constituency

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By DIANE FRANCIS
Mississauga Liberal MP Tony Abbott hungers for national prominence, according to a confidential memo he wrote which ended up last week in the hands of an Ottawa Tory MP.

"In a responsible, but calculated fashion, I want to become a cutting, controversial figure in Parliament," read Abbott's Nov. 27 memo to his five closest advisers.

The Tory MP read the entire memo into the record last week. In it, Abbott tells his workers, "the entire direction of my efforts must be measured against political objectives" for the next four months. He urges all to "put our minds to 'brain storming' how we can do things that will create a sense of excitement." Other sections suggest higher profile activities in Parliament, cabinet, the constituency office or while traveling on "official or political business".

"I should have torn it up after writing it," said an "embarrassed" Abbott in a

telephone interview yesterday. "I actually shouldn't have written it down at all."

In the memo, Abbott urged his assistants to scour Parliamentary records to find issues into which he can wade. "Even if I get the reputation of being a 'nasty piece of goods' it is preferable to obscurity," it says.

IRONIC

Ironically, the leak has boosted Abbott into national spotlight. Workers at both his Ottawa and Mississauga offices reported that media interest in the minister has swelled since the memo was read into the record Friday. The following day, Abbott's picture ran on the front page of the Globe and Mail, along with a reproduction of the memo.

The last time his face made the front page was 19 months ago after he had worked out a rustproofing agreement with automakers as minister of consumer and corporate affairs, said a worker.

Now, holding two lesser portfolios after several federal cabinet shuffles (ministry of revenue and also of small business), he clearly desires more attention.

CONFIDENTIAL

The purpose of the memo was

NOT FOR CIRCULATION

to provide a basis for discussion with his five closest advisers, explains Abbott.

Labelled "strictly confidential", he wonders now how the document could have fallen into "enemy" hands.

Abbott says he would immediately fire anyone responsible for the leak and is conducting an investigation, "although not assiduously".

Abbott's concern about plugging the leak has to do with more than just political backstabbing.

As minister of revenue, in charge of collecting taxes, he is

privity to highly confidential information about citizens' tax returns and incomes.

SERIOUS

"This is a very serious breach of security and we're taking precautions it doesn't happen again," he said.

Asked whether the memo was leaked on purpose he said, "If I wanted to leak something I would have leaked something a little better than this."

As to why he felt it important to become a "cutting controversial figure in Parliament," he replied, "It's not important now."



TONY ABBOTT
... centre stage