



**Chambre de commerce
du Montréal métropolitain**
Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal

August 25, 2005

Ms. Nathalie Normandeau
Minister of Municipal Affairs and Regions
Jean-Baptiste-De La Salle Building
10 Pierre-Olivier-Chauveau Street
Chauveau wing, B Sector, 4th floor
Quebec City, Quebec G1R 4J3

Dear Minister:

I am sure you are aware of the importance accorded by the Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal to the sound governance of metropolitan Montreal. Many times over the past few years, we have stressed the importance of an approach combining pragmatism, fairness, and efficiency, particularly with regard to the municipal reorganization of metropolitan Montreal. It was from this perspective that, following the referendums on June 20, 2004, we highlighted the importance of giving the Island of Montreal an efficient, effective agglomeration council.

The possibility raised in a Montreal newspaper on August 23 that the agglomeration council of the Island of Montreal could be composed of the mayors of the reconstituted municipalities and the entire council of the city of Montreal is therefore of deep concern to us. Indeed, it appears to us that this proposal is in many ways contrary to the spirit of Bill 9 (and its follow-up legislation, Bill 75) and, above all, unfair to the city centre and the voters who chose to remain with it during the referendums held on June 20, 2004.

Our understanding of Bill 9 and the choice offered to voters in the various sectors of the Montreal agglomeration at the time of the referendums on June 20, 2004, was that, given the reconstitution of certain municipalities, the agglomeration council would be a "light structure" enabling the city centre to efficiently exercise agglomeration powers for the entire island. As a result, this council would be relatively limited in size (in no case was it mentioned that a municipality could be represented by all the members of its council) and the representatives would form a relatively homogenous delegation, since they would be appointed by the mayor. (Article 111 of Bill 9 specifies that "if the municipality is entitled to one or more additional representatives, the mayor will appoint them from among the members of that council.")

Bill 75, the follow-up legislation, confirmed this understanding that the agglomeration council would be a streamlined body, since article 61 specifies that debates concerning the positions and orientations of the representative(s) of the municipalities linked to the agglomeration council would be determined within the councils of their respective municipalities. Both the terms of Bill 9 and the clarifications outlined in Bill 75 thus supported the understanding – communicated to voters during the referendum campaigns – that debates concerning the points of view of the various elected parties would take place within the municipal councils and the agglomeration council would essentially serve as a decision-making body.

In addition to the fact that it departs from the spirit of Bill 9 – on the basis of which voters made their choice in June 2004 – the proposal to include all council members of the city of Montreal misses its mark and generates collateral damages. This proposal would not affect the nature of the decisions made by the agglomeration council (which must necessarily have the support of the majority party and the mayor of the city of Montreal), but it would create a mechanism making it possible to block certain decisions and uselessly slow down others.

Bill 9 specifies that for a decision to be adopted by the agglomeration council, it must have the support of not only a majority of the votes represented on the agglomeration council but also a majority of the votes representing the central city. In the case of Montreal, the size of the population of the former city of Montreal – more than 50% of the island's population – ensured it would account for a majority of the votes within the council even before the referendums were held. All voters in sectors called upon to vote in June 2004 were therefore aware that Montreal would *de facto* exercise control over all decisions made by the agglomeration council.

The proposal to include all the members of the city council, and thus, the opposition members – in the case of the city of Montreal only – would change nothing in this situation except (something that is particularly rare in Montreal) in the case of a minority government. In fact, since the support of a majority of votes from the central city's delegation to the agglomeration council is essential to the adoption of a decision, in no case could an alliance between the central city's opposition members and the mayors of the reconstituted municipalities result in a decision by the agglomeration council.

On the other hand, a coalition of opposition members and mayors of the reconstituted municipalities could prevent the making of decisions – thanks to a majority vote within the agglomeration council – while making it impossible to adopt alternative measures, thereby simply paralyzing the work of the agglomeration council.

Article 61 of Bill 75 permits the casting of dissenting votes by all municipalities in the Montreal agglomeration concerning decisions to be made by the agglomeration council. To include the opposition members from the city of Montreal seems to us to be not only pointless – since we have full confidence in the city council and its ability to democratically reflect the views of Montrealers – but also completely unfair with regard to the mayors of the reconstituted municipalities, who would not have to deal with their opposition members fragmenting the vote for their sectors or participating in the alliances and coalitions that any large agglomeration council is likely to produce.

For the Board of Trade, democracy *can* be exercised, with full respect for all citizens, without creating authorities that carry within their genetic makeup the DNA of paralysis. The Montreal agglomeration and its full development are too important to the economic vitality of Quebec to risk allowing the agglomeration council to be held hostage, even occasionally, by factions refusing to give way. In addition, we believe that if it is fitting in a democracy to give citizens a

voice, it is necessary to respect that voice. In our opinion, this means, in particular, that the parameters in effect at the time a vote is taken should not be modified at a later date.

For all of these reasons, we firmly believe that this proposal runs counter to the interests of the Montreal agglomeration and changes *a posteriori* the basic conditions under which voters made their decision in June 2004. It is thus our fervent hope that you will quickly be able to confirm its rejection.

With highest regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Isabelle Hudon'.

Isabelle Hudon
President and CEO

c.c. Gérald Tremblay, mayor, City of Montreal
 Line Beauchamp, Minister responsible for the Montreal region
 Pierre Lortie, chair, Transition committee for the Montreal agglomeration