

ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN 2012: BOARD OF TRADE REQUESTS TO THE POLITICAL PARTIES

Montréal and the province of Quebec have withstood the economic turmoil of the last few years somewhat better than their neighbours. Yet, the metropolitan region, the agglomeration of Montréal in particular, is growing at a slower pace than the rest of Quebec. In fact, the agglomeration's unemployment rate is about three percentage points higher than that of the province as a whole.

A study published by the Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal in June 2012 shows that 94% of business leaders feel that the city's business environment has not improved over the last five years. They are mainly critical of the deterioration of transportation infrastructures, and they are worried about the availability of qualified labour.

This situation of economic weakness is unacceptable. It jeopardizes the city's competitive position in relation to other major North American cities, and it is detrimental to Quebec's economy.

On behalf of the city's business community, the Board of Trade is asking the political parties to indicate the measures they intend to take—should they form the next government—to ensure that the Greater Montréal region fully resumes its role as a driving force of the Quebec economy.

We are therefore calling on the parties to provide answers to the following requests.

1. WE ARE ASKING THE PARTIES TO COMMIT TO IMPLEMENTING A CONCRETE STRATEGY TO IMPROVE THE CITY'S BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

Montréal is a cosmopolitan city, a university city, a creative and dynamic city. Buoyed by the presence of several head offices, the importance of its immigrant communities, a good number of local and foreign students, and its many economic clusters, Montréal should be enjoying extraordinary entrepreneurial effervescence. Yet, despite several individual successes, Quebec's metropolis is not generating enough new businesses and is not creating enough jobs.

The political parties must indicate how they plan to make the city's business environment more conducive to business development and, more specifically, to entrepreneurship. Will they reduce the tax burden for businesses? Will they lighten the administrative conditions required by programs and rules for SMEs? Will they simplify the support package for economic development to make it more efficient? What steps will they take to increase the retention of businesses already present in the metropolitan region?

2. WE ARE ASKING THE PARTIES TO COMMIT TO MODERNIZING AND COMPLETING THE CITY'S PUBLIC TRANSIT SYSTEM

The metropolitan region is in need of massive investments to complete and modernize its public transit system. Targeted public transit investments are cost-effective, as was shown by the Board of Trade study entitled *Public Transit: At the Heart of Montréal's Economic Development*, published in November 2010. They generate positive, structuring spin-offs in terms of employment, productivity, and economic growth. In addition, these investments facilitate the transportation of goods, and, among other things, allow for a reduction of costs relating to traffic congestion, estimated at \$1.4 billion dollars in 2003.

The parties must indicate their intentions regarding the some \$23 billion in public transit projects planned for the city. What are the priority projects? What are the timelines for completion? How will they be funded?

3. WE ARE ASKING THE PARTIES TO COMMIT TO INCREASING THE CITY'S POOL OF QUALIFIED LABOUR

The city, like Quebec as a whole, must be able to rely on a deep pool of knowledge and qualified workers. The ageing of the population, which is more rapid here than elsewhere in Canada, underlines the importance of making good collective choices. According to Quebec government analyses, 1.4 million jobs will need to be filled by 2020. We have also seen high over-qualification and dropout rates, along with weak adult participation in job-related training courses.

The solution necessarily entails achieving a better match between training and the needs of the job market, as well as increasing the contribution of qualified immigrant workers. Remember that immigration is first and foremost a Montréal reality, as 87% of Quebec's immigrant population is located in the metropolitan region.

The parties must indicate their intentions with regards to improving the suitability of the labour pool for the needs of our companies. Are they in favour of greater collaboration between universities, technical schools, and businesses? Do they support an increase in the number of immigrants? How do they propose to further attract foreign talent and its integration into the work force?

4. WE ARE ASKING THE PARTIES TO COMMIT TO RESOLVING THE PROBLEM OF OVERGOVERNANCE AFFLICTING THE CITY

Montréal is suffering from a serious overgovernance problem, which is creating dysfunction and considerably delaying decision-making and action. The scattering and fragmentation of power at the municipal level, as well as the lack of metropolitan coherence at the provincial level, have been extensively documented in the Côté-Séguin report, drafted by a group of experts appointed by the Board of Trade to study questions of city governance and taxation.

The parties must acknowledge that they recognize the urgency and importance of resolving the problems affecting Montréal governance, and explain how they will go about doing so. Are they in favour of recentralizing power in order to strengthen the downtown core? Will they continue efforts to deal with the metropolitan region as a coherent whole, rather than acting in a fragmented manner with five administrative regions? Finally, going beyond the recommendations of the Côté-Séguin report, would they agree to reduce the number of boroughs and elected officials?