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Dear Friends,

Despite the severe economic impacts of COVID-19 — the pandemic caused the steepest decline in domestic economic activity since the Great Depression — the economy has remained resilient owing to the robust federal response to the crisis (8 out of every 10 dollars to fight COVID-19 and support Canadians has come from the federal government). While general COVID-19 support programs have been phased out, they have been replaced by targeted programs for hard-hit businesses including in the tourism and hospitality sectors.

While at its worst the pandemic-related slowdown cost 3 million jobs and caused GDP to shrink by 17 percent, by the end of 2021 the economy had recovered 106 percent of jobs lost (versus 83 percent in the U.S.). Compared to other G7 economies, Canada has seen the second-fastest jobs recovery. The pace of job gains has outpaced that following the 2008-09 recession. With the federal deficit and debt projected to decline relative to the size of the economy, last fall Moody's and S&P reaffirmed Canada's triple-A credit rating.

As the demand for goods and labour rise, the government is focused on the cost of living. The government recently renewed the Bank of Canada's monetary framework, maintaining the Bank's 2-percent inflation target.

The government is also addressing housing affordability and the cost of childcare as well as supply-chain congestion. The factors influencing the cost of living are varied and often external. Gas prices have been impacted by the rebalancing of the oil market following production cuts at the start of the pandemic (in response to falling demand) and then a resurgence in demand because of the global economic recovery. Meanwhile, climate-related disturbances have in some cases further disrupted supply chains, negatively impacting crop production, for example, and pushing food prices higher.

Here in the West Island, credit goes to all those companies and non-profits that have adapted to difficult circumstances; to employees and volunteers — many on the front lines — who have been keeping operations going and supply chains moving; and to citizens who have been supporting local businesses and other organizations. And a debt of gratitude, as always, is owed to our tireless medical workers who have been keeping our healthcare system functioning against unrelenting pressure.

Therapeutics procurement

While vaccination remains the best defense against COVID-19, new treatments, including antiviral drugs, can reduce the risk of hospitalization and save lives. This is why the government is providing up to \$2 billion to the Public Health Agency of Canada to support the procurement of COVID-19 therapeutics. In December, the federal government announced an agreement with Merck to provide 500,000 courses of treatment, with an option for 500,000 more, pending authorization (the case at time of writing) from Health Canada. An agreement was also signed with Pfizer for an initial 1 million courses of its treatment, again pending approval (granted for adult patients January 17).

Protecting healthcare workers

Prior to the end of 2021, Parliament unanimously adopted *Bill C-3*. The new law, a Liberal platform commitment in response to disturbances around some healthcare facilities, amends the *Criminal Code* to prohibit anyone from using fear to stop a healthcare worker — or those who assist them — from performing their duties or to prevent a person from obtaining health services. The new law also prohibits obstructing anyone from accessing health facilities. It does not, however, remove the right to protest, a Charter-protected right.

Increasing paid sick leave

As a public health measure, *Bill C-3* also provides 10 days of paid sick leave to those in federally-regulated industries, where 63 percent of workers have fewer than 10 days of paid sick leave. The government will also convene provinces, territories and other stakeholders with a view to developing a national action plan to legislate paid sick leave across the country, while recognizing the unique needs of small business owners.

Housing affordability

A robust residential real estate market has raised concerns about housing affordability. While a number of factors are responsible for rising residential real estate prices, the main reason remains a lack of sufficient housing supply: Canada has the lowest number of housing units per 1,000 residents of any G7 country.

The federal government has focused on increasing housing supply through its National Housing Strategy aimed at expanding affordable housing. In addition, it has recently committed to creating a \$4-billion Housing Accelerator Fund to grow the annual housing supply in the country's largest cities.

The government will institute a temporary ban on foreign investment capital in non-recreational residential property. It is also establishing a national 1-percent tax on the value of non-resident, non-Canadian owned residential real estate considered vacant or underused.

The government will work with the provinces to eliminate blind bidding. Further, it intends to double the First-Time Home Buyers' Tax Credit and to create a tax-free First Home Savings Account for Canadians under 40, a new instrument combining the features of an RRSP and a TFSA.



Speaking in the House of Commons



With the Prime Minister following an informal Liberal caucus meeting



With Veteran Howard McNamara and Mayor Julie Brisebois at Senneville's Memorial Park



Remembrance Day at Heroes Park in Beaconsfield

National childcare

The strength of our federal system is that it allows individual provinces to test innovative public policies that, if proven successful, can lead other provinces to adopt similar policies often with the financial support of the federal government. Medicare is an example that comes to mind. As we know, Saskatchewan was the first province to adopt medicare in 1962. A federal royal commission in 1964 led the government of Lester B. Pearson to announce it was prepared to share the cost of any provincial medicare plans that met key national criteria. In 1966, the federal *Medical Care Insurance Act* was passed.

As part of its economic growth strategy, the federal government committed \$27 billion in Budget 2021 to create a Canada-wide early learning and childcare system. The aim, among other things, is to promote greater labour force participation, especially of women, and lower the cost of childcare to families by bringing fees down to \$10 per day, on average. This national policy is inspired by Quebec's universal childcare system.

In August, as part of its Budget 2021 commitment, Ottawa signed an agreement to transfer \$6 billion to Quebec to strengthen the childcare system. As a result, in October Quebec announced it is investing at least \$3 billion to create 37,000 additional subsidized spaces. The federal government has so far signed childcare agreements with nine provinces and two territories.

The government estimates that its investment in early learning and childcare will, in addition to making life more affordable for Canadian families, also raise real GDP by as much as 1.2 percent over the next two decades.

Quebec's childcare system is an example of the economic power of an affordable, well-run early-learning and childcare system. When it was created in 1997, women's labour-force participation rate in Quebec was four percentage points below that of the rest of Canada. Today it is four points higher. Further, studies show that Quebec's childcare program alone has raised Quebec's GDP by 1.7 percent.

Finally, TD Economics has pointed to a range of studies showing that for every dollar spent on early childhood education, the economy receives between \$1.50 and \$2.80 in return. This is partly in the form of higher government revenues from taxes tied to increased economic activity.

House environment committee

Following the election, I was reappointed to the House of Commons environment committee and subsequently re-elected as its chair. The 12-member committee is composed of M.P.s from all recognized parties in the House; six Liberals, four Conservatives, and one member each from the Bloc and the NDP. The committee's main role is to receive legislation referred by the House, study that legislation with the help of expert witnesses, and make improvements through amendments before sending the legislation back to the House for final debate and voting. When committees are not considering legislation, they undertake studies in their mandated policy area and produce reports containing recommendations to the government for action.



At the *Le Spot* café with On Rock Community Services president Kim Reid



With organizers of a fundraiser for the 12 Days of Action Against Violence Against Women



With the Governor General and Ebrahim Noroozi, recipient of the Sovereign's Medal for Volunteers



Dropping by the YMCA West Island food drive

Protecting our environment

Adopted in 1988, the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act* (CEPA) is Canada's most important federal environmental law. In 1867, the environment was not considered in the Constitution's division of powers. Rather, jurisdiction over many environmental matters has been established through court decisions. In 1997, the Supreme Court established the right of the federal government to regulate the most toxic substances through the federal criminal law powers contained in the Constitution.

The first update to CEPA was in 1999. The updated law incorporated the "precautionary principle" among other new provisions. The precautionary principle states that "where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation."

CEPA 1999 also shifted the focus away from managing pollution after it has been created to preventing pollution in the first place and also included provisions for regulating vehicle emissions. Finally, CEPA 1999 established a new more rigorous and timely approach to assessing whether a substance is or may be considered "toxic" to the environment or human health.

In November 2005, the government added greenhouse-gas emissions to CEPA 1999, citing "the worldwide scientific consensus that there is sufficient and compelling evidence to conclude that greenhouse gases constitute or may constitute a danger to the environment on which life depends."

In spring 2021, the government introduced *Bill C-28* to further strengthen and modernize CEPA. *Bill C-28* recognized the right to a healthy environment; recognized the importance of considering vulnerable populations (such as Indigenous communities eating traditional foods) in substance risk assessments; endeavoured to reduce, refine or replace the use of animal testing; and recognized the importance of product labelling on the risks of toxic substances. While the bill could not be adopted before the election, the Liberal platform committed to reintroducing such a bill in the new Parliament.



Picking up home baking at the Glover Family "Chari-Tea" Holiday fundraiser



With Mayor Paola Hawa at the groundbreaking ceremony for a new medical centre in Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue




Being sworn in to the 44th Parliament in the company of my Ottawa and riding staffs

Stay in touch

The number of avenues for communication between citizens and their elected representatives has greatly increased. This is a good thing: it is only through open dialogue that politicians can get to know their constituents' priorities and link these to the business of government. My Facebook page — and Twitter account — are important vehicles for obtaining your feedback on those issues that matter to you. They also allow me to keep you informed of my activities.

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