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Dear Friends,

Capital is fundamental to a business or economy. Similarly, "social capital" is what makes a community strong and resilient.

Social capital, simply put, is the relationships we create with each other through various forms of civic participation outside business or government. The more we partake together in community life, the greater our social capital; the stronger and more resilient our community.

When we connect with our fellow citizens, especially with those outside our like-minded circle, we create bonds of trust. This doesn't mean we all suddenly see eye to eye. It means simply that we come to recognize the good intentions of others, the merit of their ideas and the value of their knowledge and skills for advancing the common good.

Trust among citizens leads naturally to trust in institutions, something that is vital for a healthy democracy. That's because we no longer see our institutions as anonymous, remote and not aligned with our interests. It is, after all, our fellow citizens who make up those institutions, our neighbours, the same people we see and engage with every day in the community.

So far, in Canada we have avoided the kind of polarization we too often see elsewhere, especially south of the border

where people have become so mistrustful and divided around politics they can no longer agree on basic facts and realities.

The West Island is rich in social capital. I am reminded of this every day in my contact with constituents and community organizations of all kinds. The summer Parliamentary recess — those months when I get to spend uninterrupted quality time in our riding — only serves to reinforce my sense of the West Island's vibrant community solidarity.

The full list of community activities I had the opportunity to attend this past summer — from Canada Day flag raisings and St-Jean celebrations to AQVA's Coupe du Québec for sailors with limited mobility, the 80th D-Day anniversary ceremony at the National Field of Honour, the ALPS swimming finals, and visits to organizations like the West Island Mission that received funding under the Canada Summer Jobs program — is too long to mention here. But one truth stands out. The West Island is a shining example of what a true community looks like — a place where citizens come together not only to celebrate but also to help and support each other when the need arises.

The notwithstanding clause

The notwithstanding clause allows a government to ignore a court decision that finds one of its laws has violated the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The notwithstanding clause was a condition of the provincial premiers for allowing Pierre Trudeau to patriate the Constitution and add the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to it. But the clause was never intended to be used casually. It was meant to be used only rarely, if at all, as an emergency “safety valve” to, for example, give public opinion time to adjust to a court finding that rights have been violated and a government time to change its law to make it comply with the Charter. If used at all, the clause was at minimum meant to be used only after the fact — that is, following a court ruling.

Regrettably, some provincial governments — Quebec, Ontario and Saskatchewan — have taken to invoking the notwithstanding clause preemptively, in advance of a law reaching the courts. They have done so by inserting the clause directly into the law they are seeking to shield from the Charter. This effectively prevents the court from studying those aspects of the law that might run afoul of Charter rights.

A case in point: in its recent ruling, the Quebec Court of Appeal did not consider how Bill 21, the province’s secularism law, might violate Charter rights. This is because the Legault government chose to insert the notwithstanding clause directly into the law itself, rather than wait for a possibly unfavourable court ruling and then applying the clause in response. Clearly, the court decided that looking at how Bill 21 might contravene certain Charter rights was futile given the up-front mention of the notwithstanding clause in the legislation itself.

Preemptive use of the notwithstanding clause robs the public of the opportunity to witness a full debate on why a government feels it necessary to suppress Charter rights. On the other hand, if a government decides to apply the clause after a court ruling, it must introduce stand-alone legislation specifically for that purpose. This is more likely to draw media and public attention to the issue.

Doing away with the notwithstanding clause would require the unanimous consent of all provinces, something that is not realistic. That said, governments should not be allowed to invoke the clause preemptively. Or at the very least, they should be required to state the specific rights they are seeking to override — and why. Burying the notwithstanding clause in the body of the larger law a government is seeking to shield from the Charter denies the electorate the democratic transparency to which it is entitled.

The matter of the clause’s use, and whether limits should be placed on that use, will surely be addressed by the Supreme Court should it agree soon to hear an appeal of the Quebec Court of Appeal’s decision on Bill 21. Our government has said it will be there to defend the Charter!

The Conservatives and Bloc Quebecois reject outright placing any conditions on the notwithstanding clause. They stated so in February 2023 when they voted together in Parliament in favour of a Bloc motion insisting that no conditions or restrictions be placed on the notwithstanding clause’s use. Fortunately, the Bloc motion was defeated with Liberals voting against it.



Appearing at the House environment committee with hydrologist Dr. John Pomeroy to present my bill to improve flood forecasting



At a meet-and-greet in Pointe-Claire for West Island Olympians



At the Teresa Dellar Palliative Care Residence with students hired under the Canada Summer Jobs program



Attending the 80th D-Day anniversary ceremony at the National Field of Honour

Pharmacare

Recognizing that affordable medicines are key to relieving pressure on family budgets and ensuring a healthier population, the government has recently introduced legislation to create a universal, single-payer national pharmacare program. Bill C-64 will give the federal Minister of Health the power to enter into agreements with provinces and territories to improve the affordability of pharmacare products, beginning with contraceptives and diabetes medications. Separately, the government has announced its intention to establish a fund to support access to diabetes devices and supplies. The Canadian Drug Agency will develop a national formulary (a list of insured drugs and related products) for expanding coverage beyond contraceptives and diabetes medications.

Foreign credential recognition in healthcare

Many who want to make Canada their home possess the education, skills and experience that could enable them to work in our healthcare system. Often, all they need is the opportunity to align the training they have received abroad with the certification requirements of the professional orders that govern physicians, dentists, nurses, pharmacists, laboratory technicians, respiratory specialists, and others.

The federal government is intent on doing what it can to help remove barriers to foreign credential recognition. In October 2023, the federal minister of health and the health ministers of the provinces and territories committed to streamlining foreign credential recognition so that healthcare professionals from abroad can get to work in Canada more quickly. Then, in January 2024 Ottawa announced an extra \$86 million for its Foreign Credentials Recognition Program to support 15 projects to facilitate the recognition of the foreign credentials of 6,600 internationally educated healthcare professionals. Funded projects will focus on simplifying the steps in credential recognition; providing internationally educated healthcare professionals with relevant Canadian work experience; offering those working toward recognition of their credentials support services such as childcare, transportation, mentoring and coaching.

First Nations drinking water

Since taking office, the government has made a priority of providing safe drinking water to First Nations communities. Ottawa has invested \$7.3 billion to support infrastructure related to water and wastewater in First Nations communities. The results have been positive. Since 2015, 145 long-term drinking water advisories have been lifted (82 percent of all long-term advisories) and work is at advanced stages in 15 percent of the remaining cases. This leaves 3 percent of cases where water projects are either at the feasibility-study phase or design phase. To consolidate this progress in law, the government has introduced Bill C-61, the First Nations Clean Water Act. Bill C-61 affirms the inherent right of First Nations to self-government in relation to water, source water, drinking water, wastewater, and related infrastructure on, in and under First Nation lands. Because protecting source water is fundamental to ensuring safe drinking water, Bill C-61 creates a legal framework for protecting source waters adjacent to First Nation lands.



With members of the Lac-Saint-Louis Youth Council



Celebrating the St-Jean holiday at Beaconsfield's Centennial Park



Speaking with constituents in Pointe-Claire Village on Canada Day



At the Montreal Pride Parade

The Canada Child Benefit

Introduced by the Liberal government in 2016, the Canada Child Benefit remains perhaps the most significant social policy innovation in a generation. The CCB's dual objective is to help reduce child poverty — since 2015, 650,000 children have been lifted out of poverty — while also relieving pressure on family budgets. The CCB is a non-taxable benefit paid monthly. Since 2018, it has been indexed to inflation. In the fiscal year 2022-2023, Lac-Saint-Louis received a total of \$52,6 million in CCB payments, helping support both families and the local economy.

National School Food Program

Today, nearly one in four children in Canada do not get enough food. Study after study has shown that when kids eat well, they do better in school. And when kids do well in school, that sets them up for success in life. The government is launching a new National School Food Program to help ensure children have the food they need to get a fair start in life regardless of family circumstance. The program will provide \$1 billion over five years to Employment and Social Development Canada, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada and Indigenous Services Canada to work with provinces, territories and Indigenous partners to expand access to school food programs. The program's initial target will be to provide meals to 400,000 more kids every year.

Supporting renters

Residential rents are regulated by the provinces. However, the federal government recognizes that rising rents are a major challenge for Canadians across the country. Ottawa is therefore using the tools at its disposal to support renters. In Budget 2024, the federal government announced it will be launching a new \$15-million Tenant Protection Fund to support organizations that provide legal and informational services to help tenants defend their rights. The federal government will also work with the provinces and territories to create a new Canadian Renters' Bill of Rights.



Visiting the headquarters of the Pointe-Claire Volunteer Rescue Unit



Handing out Canadian flags at the annual Baie d'Urfe Days Parade




With the BHS Senior Jazz Band following their performance at the Montreal International Jazz Festival

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 X 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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