



# A LIBERAL PLAN FOR AN ASSERTIVE, UNITED, AND PROSPEROUS QUEBEC



The Reflection and Consultation Committee Report on the Revival of the Québec Liberal Party

# Summary

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# A LIBERAL PLAN FOR AN ASSERTIVE, UNITED, AND PROSPEROUS QUEBEC

## Executive Summary

After having heard from over 500 individuals during a tour of all regions of Québec and consulting various experts, the Reflection and Consultation Committee on the Revival of the Québec Liberal Party acknowledges that Liberals remain proud of the values that underpin their political action. There is no question for them of abandoning these principles out of opportunism or populism.

However, it is clear that the QLP must renew itself and offer a discourse and proposals in line with Québec in the 2020s. It is about presenting a new liberal project for all Quebecers.

Formed in March 2023, the Committee on the Revival of the QLP was mandated to travel throughout Québec to define liberalism today and offer the Party proposals so that it can meet the aspirations of Quebecers.

The Committee is composed of 14 members who reflect the generational, regional, and cultural diversity of the Party and of Québec today. Our role was not to elaborate an electoral platform for the Party; this task belongs to the political commission and the new Party leader. This document is therefore only the first step in the reconstruction of the Party.

Through our consultations focused on the values and main principles of Québec liberalism, the participants expressed themselves on many subjects, notably on the weaknesses they observed within our own Party. The Committee invites the QLP to pay particular attention to the feedback from its members.

**This report is above all the work of the active members who gave their time to reflect and discuss the future of the Québec Liberal Party. We would like to sincerely thank them.**

## A Renewed Approach

Québec is a distinct nation with its own language, culture and values; a nation confident in its capacities. We must both preserve our common language and the foundations of liberal society on which our nation is built. The Liberal members we met expressed that:

**We must** be proud to be Quebecers, proud to be Canadians, and continue to prioritize the protection and promotion of Québec's interests within the Canadian federation.

**We must** unite Quebecers, no matter their personal or social characteristics, around our official language, French, while respecting our fundamental rights.

**We must** prioritize a coherent vision of our economic development that generates, in every region, the prosperity needed to reach greater social justice goals, sustainable development and intergenerational equity.

We summarize our propositions, and the nine values of the Québec Liberal Party, as listed by Mr. Claude Ryan, under three action verbs: Assert. Unite. Prosper. Indeed, principles are nothing if they are not guiding action.

## An Assertive Québec

The QLP is not afraid to assert its deeply-held values. Thus, the freedom of individuals to live their lives as they see fit, while respecting others, is at the heart of our very conception of politics.

We are also convinced that Québec is more culturally, socially, and economically prosperous when it plays a leadership role within the Canadian federation. The Committee proposes an inclusive and uniting liberal affirmation project, which reflects the history and values of the QLP.

**Among the proposals brought forward are the following:**

- Drafting a Québec Constitution;
- Implementing a preferential voting system;
- Allowing Québec to control the admission of temporary immigrants;
- Transforming the Canadian Senate into a Chamber of Provinces;
- Adopting new measures with regard to Francophonie so Québec may be its leader in Canada and around the world;
- Confirming the existing rights of English-speaking Quebecers.

**The QLP must assert itself, and Québec must assert itself.**

## **A United Québec**

In the face of the challenges confronting Québec, Quebecers must unite around a common project. This is what the Committee proposes: the Québec Liberal Party must put forward a bold, inclusive, and unifying nationalism.

It is true that there exist nowadays in Québec a legitimate concern about the future of the French language and culture. We do not deny this observation, and propose ideas anchored in our liberal heritage and aimed at uniting all citizens around Québec's identity, such as:

- The adoption of a Law on interculturalism;
- The implementation of an in-depth reform of French language education;
- Establishing incentive measures for our businesses to promote the use of the French language within the workplace;
- Pacifying the political discourse, through the establishment of a committee of independent experts charged with assessing Québec's capacity to welcome and integrate immigrants.

An inclusive and unifying nationalism: that is what the QLP must promote.

## **A Prosperous Québec**

Québec is prosperous only when it creates the conditions that allow for complementarity between economic development, social justice, and environmental protection. The QLP must return to the approach that has made it the choice of Quebecers when it comes to ensuring an economically strong and stable Québec.

**To develop the economy, we must:**

- Adopt a Law on the Protection against Inflation and on Housing Accessibility;
- Establish a “Minimum Activity Income”;
- Hold a Summit on the future of Québec;
- Establish a national industrial strategy.

### **To simplify life for Quebecers, we must:**

- Ensure more efficient and humane government services;
- Work towards a single tax return;
- Aim to reduce the bureaucratic burden on SMEs.

### **To protect the environment, we must:**

- Find innovative ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions;
- Focus on the exploitation of our natural resources to contribute to Québec's targets in combating climate change and energy transition;
- Consolidate the right to a healthy environment in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms of Individuals ;
- Entrust the issue of climate change to the Premier Minister.

### **To develop the regions, we must:**

- Give our regions the necessary tools so that they can make their own decisions;
- Invest to provide our regions with modern and efficient transportation systems and road networks;
- Ensure regional representation from each ministry;
- Review taxation and implement a new funding program for regional development.

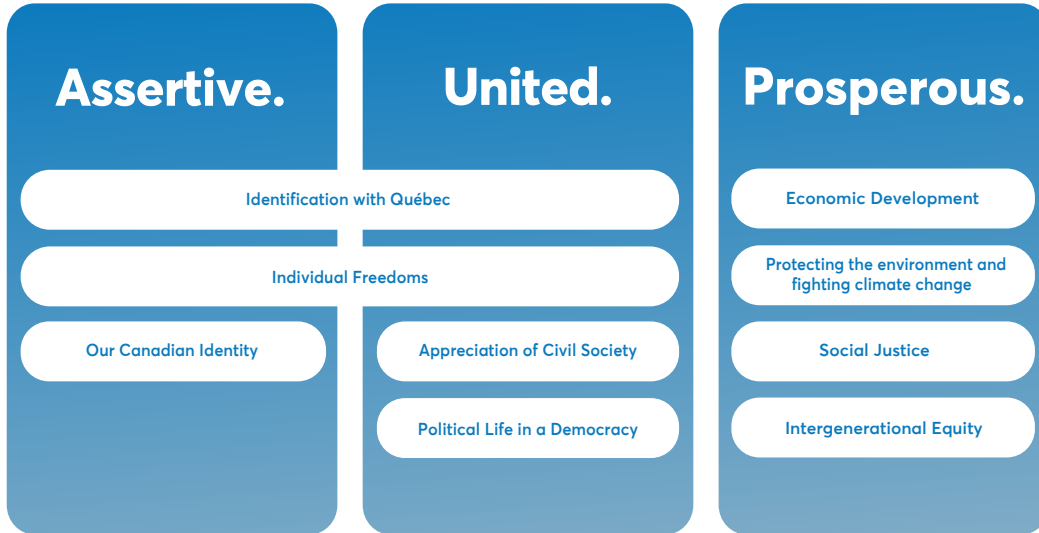
## **In terms of economic development, the QLP must have a clear and unifying vision.**

During this extensive consultation, we have concluded that the QLP has a solid base in every region of Québec—a base on which we can rebuild.

We hope our work will contribute to giving Liberals a renewed sense of pride and confidence in who they are: proud Quebecers and proud Canadians, profoundly committed to the French language and Québec culture, and to the great liberal ideas that have shaped modern Québec.

We are convinced that, in view of the 2026 elections, our political Party will be able to propose a new, unifying societal project for the Québec of today and of tomorrow.

Develop with us this new vision of society for the future of Québec, this great liberal project for all Quebecers.



# INTRODUCTION

Our era has been shaped by significant changes on a global scale and our planet is facing the existential challenges associated with climate change. The major world powers are vying for military, political and economic hegemony, and while the capitalist system has produced an unprecedented amount of collective enrichment, it has also led to severe environmental damage and social inequalities. In addition, although the digital revolution and artificial intelligence present countless opportunities, they both raise serious concerns. Finally, American culture continues to dominate, which presents considerable challenges for national cultures.

Despite these ongoing challenges, Québec is a nation characterized by its language, culture, and values; a nation confident in its abilities, yet anxious in the face of the strong currents it must confront. In this context, governing the province requires that our leaders protect and promote the French language and culture while ensuring fair, sustainable economic development. Moreover, it is essential to preserve the foundations of a liberal society on which our nation was built, including democracy, the rule of law and the respect of fundamental rights. Considering all these factors, one question comes to mind: why did the political party that holds these values so dearly perform so poorly in the last general election? Let's put it simply: after more than a decade in power, Quebecers have spoken, and they need us to change our ways.

Following the elections that took place on October 2, 2022, the Québec Liberal Party formed a Reflection and Consultation Committee on the revival of the Party. The Committee, composed of 14 Party members from diverse backgrounds, gathered the input of hundreds of Liberal members and supporters from all regions of Québec, members of various Party bodies, including those from the caucus, and experts from various fields. The outcome of the consultations was clear: Liberals are proud of the values their Party represents and will not compromise these principles for political expediency or populism.

The Liberal Party acknowledges the need for change, particularly in the tone and manner used to convey liberal ideas. Change is also required in its policies and projects, and how the Party is organized and communicates.



## Relevant Values

In this third decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the relevance of liberal values has become increasingly apparent.

Québec Liberals prioritize defending and promoting Québec's interests, which includes protecting and promoting French as a common language among all Quebecers.

We prioritize Québec's interests and believe in our province's active participation in the Canadian federation. Canada is not just a larger political entity that includes Québec; it is an essential aspect of our identity. We are, therefore, proud to be Quebecers and proud to be Canadians.

As a political party that values and respects the rights and freedoms of all individuals, we firmly believe that it is possible to protect and preserve the French language while respecting the fundamental rights of Quebecers, including the existing rights of the English-speaking community and its institutions.

According to Liberals, a strong economy is the foundation of a strong nation. In these uncertain times, we believe that a strong economy is not achieved through a series of disjointed announcements but rather through a clear vision based on a sound understanding of the larger global context and the freedom of individuals and companies to pursue and carry out innovative projects.

For Liberals, economic development is only significant if it goes hand-in-hand with social justice and environmental protection; those are the three cornerstones of liberal economic philosophy.

Liberals believe in both the individual and the community. We strive to grant decision-making powers and financial resources to Québec's many regions, allowing them to be responsible for their own development.

Many concerned citizens and Liberal members have pointed out that the current state of the Québec government falls short of providing the quality of service that its citizens deserve. We aim to shift the paradigm in Québec to ensure the state fulfills its responsibilities.

## Listening to Quebecers

In recent months, our Committee has been listening to Quebecers, particularly to active Liberal members and supporters. They told us that the Québec Liberal Party has lost touch with the population. Quebecers are worried about the future of their language and values that distinguish

us as a nation. They believe that the QLP neither understands nor shares their concerns. Worse, some felt that the Party looked down on them, as if they were wrong to be concerned about their future.

It is essential for any political party to prioritize the protection of the French language as well as the values of the nation if they wish to govern Québec. The QLP must establish a stronger connection with Quebecers by recognizing the challenges faced by the province and proposing liberal solutions. This does not entail abandoning the values that the QLP has long been associated with, but rather, acknowledging the current reality of Québec and responding appropriately.

It is crucial to not only focus on the French-speaking majority when reconnecting with Quebecers. We must also consider the aspirations and concerns of the English-speaking minority and Quebecers from diverse cultural communities, who are an integral part of modern Québec, and who have also felt neglected by our political Party.

## **Assert. Unite. Prosper.**

In the following report, the Committee has outlined various options for the QLP to consider. Our aim was not to create the Party's election platform, as this is the responsibility of the Policy Committee and the newly elected leader. Nonetheless, these ideas serve as concrete examples of the liberal approach that we propose.

Our liberal values and ideas are divided into three themes, each represented by an action verb: assert, unite, and prosper. This approach emphasizes the importance of turning values into action. Our ideas align with all nine QLP values outlined by Claude Ryan in 2002<sup>1</sup> and amended by the Party's Youth Commission. However, as suggested by some members, grouping them under these three themes makes them more accessible.

We hope that the work of the Renewal Committee will help bring back the pride and confidence of the Liberals' identity as proud Quebecers and Canadians, deeply attached to the French language, Québec values, and the liberal principles that have shaped modern Québec such as the protection of the rights of individuals and minorities.

This report is only the first step in the necessary reconstruction of our Party. The stages that lie ahead will demand effort from all those who believe in our liberal ideals. We are confident that, leading up to the 2026 elections, our political Party will present a new social project for all Quebecers.

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Claude Ryan, *Les valeurs libérales et le Québec moderne*. Édition révisée, Parti libéral du Québec, 2016.

# WHAT LIBERALS TOLD US

## Chapter 1

Over the last months, the Renewal Committee travelled across Québec and organized 15 regional consultations. We engaged with over 500 individuals from diverse backgrounds, each with his or her own perspective on the identity and future of our Party. These consultations brought forth a wide range of viewpoints, with most participants sharing their thoughts and ideas on what it means to be a liberal in 2023, the QLP's position on the new political chessboard, and the principles driving Québec liberalism today.

We want to thank our members and supporters for their invaluable contribution to this project. Through us, they were able to address the QLP and share their thoughts and aspirations and therefore, it is crucial that our report accurately reflects their perspective.

### The Liberal Values

Though it is worth mentioning that these values were never put into question, during the consultations and given the current political situation, there was agreement on the need to update and simplify the nine liberal values defined by Claude Ryan in his book published in 2002 and later amended by the Party's Youth Commission. Various stakeholders suggested grouping values into comprehensive categories while also preserving their individual integrity.

### Defending Québec's Interests

In relation to the topics of nationalism and federalism, the Liberal Party places a strong emphasis on serving Québec's interests within the Canadian Federation. Liberal priorities include strengthening the French language and culture in Québec and across North America, protecting the rights and freedoms of individuals, promoting economic growth while preserving the environment, and striving towards a more just and equitable society.

Moreover, for many participants, liberal nationalism is an essential feature of our historical identity. As a participant from the Capitale-Nationale region summed it up:

*“We have always been nationalists within the Canadian federation, but we do not consider foreigners, immigrants, English speakers, and allophones as a threat. Instead, we consider them an asset.”<sup>2</sup>*

The QLP stands out from other political parties because it promotes liberal nationalism, which strives to uphold individual freedoms outlined by our charters, as well as provincial autonomy. Based on this, those consulted agreed that the Party should clearly establish its vision of federalism. This vision should emphasize a solid attachment to Canada while also asserting Québec’s desire for greater autonomy and complete sovereignty in its areas of jurisdiction. This federalism is considered not just a preferable system of governance but also the best means to ensure the prosperity of the province and the preservation of the French language in North America. This belief extends to a broader vision of our Francophone identity, which is shared by a participant from Bas-Saint-Laurent:

*“I firmly believe that the place of Francophones in Canada goes beyond the borders of Québec, which, to me, is the central pole of the French language in North America. My vision of nationalism includes French speakers from every corner of the country, and it is this global perspective that makes our nationalism stronger than that of the sovereignists.”*

Many participants acknowledged that tensions with the federal government should not be feared nor exacerbated. According to them, the National Assembly should be able to communicate its opinions clearly, especially regarding Québec’s interests, without resorting to unnecessary confrontations. Additionally, there is a desire for Québec to take a more active role in collaborating with other provinces, for example through the French-speaking business networks, to achieve common objectives such as economic development, the fight against climate change and the transition to renewable energy.

Moreover, the people we consulted expressed that without a strong federalist project and a vision that goes beyond the status quo, questions regarding Québec’s constitutional status have become a subject that no longer generates the same amount of interest, particularly among young people. During the Abitibi-Témiscamingue consultation, members from the Party’s Youth Commission also noted that for many members and supporters of their generation, federalism and nationalism are distinct and opposed concepts. These young members believe that only a straightforward, innovative, concrete project could reverse this trend and demonstrate that these two notions are perfectly compatible.

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The quotations presented in the English edition of this report are translations of the original French versions.

## French Language and Education

During the consultations held to discuss the state of the French language in Québec, participants emphasized the importance of avoiding identity-based nationalism, which tends to exclude and divide society along linguistic lines. Indeed, the vitality and longevity of the French language are priorities shared by the vast majority of those we spoke with. However, the use of laws that violate the rights of Quebecers and the hostility expressed by some politicians towards immigration were described as harmful to the protection of the French language. Their actions are seen as more of a hindrance to integration, as they send a clear message to new immigrants and non-French-speaking minorities that they will not be full-fledged Quebecers if they cannot learn and demonstrate an adequate knowledge of French within a few months. According to these same stakeholders, all the anxiety and guilt it entails only discourages learning and using French.

Also, during the discussions, several speakers emphasized that immigration does not pose a threat to the French language. One member from the Eastern Townships stated that:

*“It is not true that immigration is a threat to the French language. The focus should not solely be on the first generation of immigrants, as the second generation is often more critical in terms of integration. They often even integrate better into our society and culture than French Canadians born here.”*

At the same time, Liberal members and supporters want English-speaking people and immigrants to be able to obtain health and social services in the language of their choice, for the sake of mutual understanding between the consulted professional and the citizen. As one Montréal participant pointed out:

*“I speak French daily, and I strongly support the protection and promotion of the French language and the French-speaking community. My children were raised in French and are fluent in both languages. However, when I visit my doctor, I prefer to communicate with him in my native language, as I find it easier to discuss more technical matters.”*

Also, English-speaking participants were concerned that strengthening measures to preserve the French language would conflict with their rights, institutions, and socio-economic opportunities in Québec. Both Francophones and Anglophones who spoke on this subject acknowledged the historical rights of the English-speaking community, insisting, as did this Laurentian member, that:

*“The protection of the French language should not be at the expense of English, but by investing in education and teaching French properly.”*

Many believe that the best way to promote and maintain the French language in Québec is by improving the quality of language education, beginning with elementary and secondary school. In addition to helping immigrants access the job market, members and supporters of the Liberal Party emphasize the importance of investing heavily in the education system. This will not only equip young people and newcomers with the ability to communicate effectively in French but also enable them to participate fully in Québec's socio-cultural life. As such, education is seen as a means of promoting social and economic justice.

Furthermore, several members supported, alongside the strengthening of the teaching of French, their support for promoting English as a second language education. Residents of areas remote from Montréal, Outaouais, and the Eastern Townships voiced their concerns about the challenges they face in learning and practising English and urged us to support initiatives that facilitate the teaching of English in their communities.

## A Pragmatic Party

Regarding the QLP's position on the political spectrum, some Liberals argued that the Party should openly identify itself as "centre-right" by adopting less interventionist policies, thereby providing more space for entrepreneurship and inviting greater investment within Québec. In contrast, some advocated for a shift to the "centre-left", stating that they were more concerned about social and economic inequalities and desired more government intervention. No one suggested, however, that economic progress should be sacrificed for social justice or vice versa.

During the consultation process, some participants expressed their desire to see the QLP establish itself as a firmly centrist party. However, the majority of those consulted preferred to see us as a party that prioritizes pragmatism over the emotional stances of other parties. They rejected the labels "left", "right", and "centre", viewing them as outdated and insufficient to accurately define our political stance.

Despite differences in terminology, there is a consensus that what differentiates the Québec Liberal Party and has allowed it to remain relevant over time is its ability to evolve and adapt to the realities of each specific era, in part thanks to its core values of open-mindedness and consensus building.

## Pacifying the Political Discourse

One important characteristic of Québec liberalism is its commitment to pacifying political discussions on controversial topics. This approach demonstrates political maturity and a desire for balance between conflicting interests that are often unnecessarily set in opposition. This includes issues related to individual rights, protection of language and culture, environmentalism, social justice, and economic growth. The liberal vision aims to solve social problems by uniting rather than dividing or accusing. As a participant from Outaouais reminded us:

*“We must not fuel divisions as other political parties do. As a mature entity, we should mitigate contentious matters by treating people like adults and trusting Quebecers to discuss issues without resorting to conflict. This approach will help us gain the support of voters.”*

The Québec Liberal Party is committed to resisting populism and promoting a mature and tolerant discourse. This commitment extends to issues of diversity and inclusivity, which are central to the Party’s identity. Those who were consulted described the Party as one that vigorously upholds French and Québec values while also defending the rights and freedoms of minorities, new Quebecers, First Nations and Inuit against all forms of exclusion and unjustified barriers.

During our consultations, participants reminded us of the importance of being liberal-minded, which means being open and tolerant towards ideas that differ from our own. They emphasized that the Québec Liberal Party should promote a society that brings all individuals together, regardless of their religious, moral, or political beliefs, and prioritize respect for the individual rights of all Quebecers. The participants’ strong opposition to the abusive use of the notwithstanding clauses in the Canadian and Québec charters of rights and freedoms also reflects a humanist approach that values the individual rights of all Quebecers.

## Asserting Ourselves as Liberals

As far as our recent history goes, many participants emphasized the importance of embracing and fully owning the QLP’s legacy. Our supporters consider it a source of pride and a solid foundation on which to build and innovate. Our members and supporters have made it clear that any attempt to distance ourselves from the past record of Liberal governments is equivalent to allowing our opponents to define us. While we should not idealize our past mandates, our members are asking us to stand firm on our values and heritage instead of apologizing for them. They want to see us

reaffirm these values strongly to restore confidence in our former members and voters. During the consultation in the Capitale-Nationale region, one member summarized their perspective:

*“The QLP should stop apologizing for defending its fundamental values and achievements. Only then can we begin to rebuild. If some members believe that another party has better values and achievements, it is our responsibility to convince them that our Party is best, and we cannot accomplish this by being ashamed of who we are.”*

This does not mean being nostalgic; it means embracing a future in which the QLP stays true to its values while adapting to the challenges of the modern world.

## A Party from Québec

One of the defining characteristics of Québec liberalism is its independence from the Liberal Party of Canada (LPC). Although the consulted individuals are federalists, they are eager for the Québec Liberal Party to maintain a unique identity and autonomy from all federal parties. Members in the Eastern Townships emphasized that being federalists does not mean that we are “bound to do everything the federal government wants”. They also wanted to make clear, as did many other participants, that we are not and never will be “a branch of the LPC”. On the other hand, the Liberals consulted believe that the QLP must remain open to members of all federal political parties, provided they share our attachment to Québec and Canada, as well as our values.

A number of members and supporters also told us that, for them, the QLP was the truly inclusive party in Québec. While some individuals may have hesitated to identify as nationalists due to the belief that nationalism is incompatible with diversity, this was not the prevailing sentiment among the majority who shared their views on this matter. Instead, they saw Liberals’ inclusive nationalism and interculturalism as a way to reconcile the protection of individual rights and freedoms while affirming Québec’s unique identity. Many also encouraged the promotion and reclamation of Québec’s cultural symbols and landmarks, including the flag of Québec and Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day. One member from Îles-de-la-Madeleine stated:

*“The QLP should take up more space in areas where separatist parties and the CAQ have taken over symbols and landmarks belonging to all Quebecers, including federalists.”*

We noted that some participants prefer multiculturalism, which does not advocate the primacy of Québec’s shared culture, to interculturalism. Some believe both positions are equal, while others think multiculturalism is perfectly compatible with federal policies, alongside Québec’s interculturalism. Despite the diversity of opinions, most comments on this topic support interculturalism, viewing it as the most fair and unifying position for the nation of Québec.



## Successful Immigration

The Liberals recognize the significant contribution of immigrants historically and how they have come to shape modern Québec. They reject the notion that immigrants are welcome with the sole purpose of mitigating labour shortages, as some politicians like to imply. In the liberal vision, newcomers choose Québec as their home and become full-fledged members of society, with equal dignity and participation in building our community. As an Outaouais Liberal member stated: “Their achievements are our achievements, and their issues are our issues.”

During our consultations, members of the Cultural Communities Committee expressed feeling neglected and viewed as second-class citizens by some political parties. They felt they were only valued for their role in addressing labour shortages. However, they also had concerns about attitudes they described as infantilizing. As a result, they encouraged the QLP to emphasize the socio-economic success of individuals from immigrant backgrounds, and to consider them as people who have come here, who have chosen Québec to raise their family and prosper. This would allow those who have been told that the Québec identity was inaccessible to them to recognize that they are in fact at home here, and that no one has the right to question their belonging to our nation.

## The Party of the Economy

The QLP has been known historically as the “Party of the economy” due to its strong economic policies, a label that still holds significance to the members and supporters we consulted. Although the Party’s image may have been undermined in recent years, most participants emphasized the importance of regaining this title. According to them, an economic party is characterized by its support for entrepreneurs and SMEs, its ability to carry out large projects, and its trust in the judgment and autonomy of individuals. It must also have a preference for free markets, understanding that prosperity is the best guarantee of a socially strong and compassionate state, capable of fulfilling essential missions. Liberals believe that a robust capitalist economy, combined with a government responsive to social inequalities and the environmental crisis, allows for more effective state intervention by providing the necessary financial resources. A member from the Eastern Townships region reminded us that Robert Bourassa believed that: “Only through having a prosperous society can we achieve our goals.”

Many people who were consulted expressed their desire for the QLP to be a party that puts trust in individuals, allowing them to make the best decisions for themselves and their families. This sentiment is reinforced by several supporters who expressed the will to provide Quebecers with a tax system that incentivizes work and allows for greater flexibility. Our party was urged to address

increasing prices and the housing crisis, recognize foreign workers' contributions, and effectively resolve labour shortages. Moreover, many participants emphasized the Party's participation in debates on significant industrial and social changes due to the rapid rise of telework, artificial intelligence, and robotization.

Many members and supporters also encouraged us to reposition ourselves as the party capable of making the government apparatus and its bureaucratic more effective and efficient, but also more humane. Indeed, for many of those who expressed themselves on the topic, the economic impact of the slowness and heaviness of bureaucracy is a hindrance on optimal economic growth.

## **Caring for the Elderly, Securing a Future for the Young**

During our consultations, some participants voiced their concerns about the quality of life of senior citizens. From their perspective, a liberal government should utilize economic development to provide quality healthcare and social services geared towards seniors. Our members and supporters believe that the healthcare system, whether in hospitals, nursing homes, home care, or home support, cannot be improved significantly without addressing the shortage of employees. As one member from Montréal pointed out:

*“The healthcare system allows us to live past 80, and to have a good quality of life. We want to remain living in our homes for as long as we can, but we still require assistance at times. Therefore, our home support program needs to be expanded, but this cannot be achieved without addressing the workforce shortage.”*

Also, several retired members have expressed concerns about the rapidly increasing cost of living. Their retirement incomes cannot match inflation, and the soaring costs of home care or the increase in rent all add to their financial uncertainty.

As for Québec youth, according to our members and supporters, it is crucial to provide a social and environmental project to the younger generations that addresses their most pressing concerns. Young people face an uncertain future, both in terms of climate change and the economy. From the incessant increase in interest rates, the increase in the prices of food and goods, or the housing crisis, young people are experiencing a decline in their quality of life compared to previous generations. Moreover, they are rightly concerned that they will be the most affected by the climate crisis. Therefore, they have strongly urged the QLP to develop a comprehensive social project to address these issues clearly and practically. Participants have stressed that when young people vote, it's usually to support a cause. Therefore, the Party has a golden opportunity to demonstrate its economic proficiency and establish itself as the most reliable option to alleviate the financial strain and environmental stressors faced by our youth.

## A Global Crisis

During discussions about the environmental crisis, the participants unanimously agreed on the severity of the situation and stressed the need for immediate and concrete actions. Furthermore, they emphasized the importance of promoting change in our individual and collective behaviours to prevent further environmental destruction while investing in climate resilience and adaptation. The Liberals interviewed know that the planet is in danger and that the situation will worsen if significant action is not taken.

Although many Quebecers share concerns about the crisis, the Liberal Party stands apart from opposition parties by believing that economic stagnation or a return to a more basic way of life is not the solution. Instead, they believe that innovation and ingenuity, fostered by economic liberalism, are crucial to protecting the environment and maintaining a high standard of living globally. In their opinion, Québec can play a significant role in supporting the ecological transition of other countries, provinces and states with which it maintains relations. They emphasized that Québec has the potential to offer an alternative to polluting energy sources by exporting our green electricity to neighbouring provinces and states, or by promoting Québec's expertise internationally.

## Greater Autonomy for Our Regions

One of the unique characteristics of Québec liberalism is its emphasis on the protection of regional economic interests. Members and supporters of the QLP view the party as the one most sensitive to local and regional concerns, especially regarding transportation, natural resources, and wildlife. They also believe the regions should be granted more autonomy, as well as decentralized services and decision-making processes. Additionally, large-scale projects must result from consultation with local stakeholders and not be imposed or favoured. As highlighted by a member from Gaspésie, we must consider prevailing local economic realities and incorporate them into a stable industrial development policy “that does not change every six months”. Flexibility and a long-term vision are essential in creating a comprehensive, sustainable, and adaptable plan. Specifically, such a plan should ensure strong cellular coverage and internet accessibility and address transportation concerns in remote areas of Québec. This will allow people to continue living and flourishing in their local communities.

Liberals also agree on the need to attract more workers to the regions and call for strategies to integrate a more significant number of immigrants in a shorter period. We were informed of severe housing scarcity that has intensified the issue of labour shortages. Another member from Gaspésie highlighted this issue, stating: “We will not be able to extract our resources if we do not have the workforce to do it, and we also need to be able to provide them housing!”

## Criticism of the Party

During our regional consultations, we discussed the fundamental values and principles of Québec liberalism and explored their modernization. However, many participants expressed concerns about the weaknesses in the organization of the Party, its communications, and the relationship between the Party, its elected representatives, and its supporters. Therefore, the Committee decided to include a summary of these critical comments in this report as the future of the Party depends on the effectiveness, efficiency, and agility of what is commonly referred to as the “liberal machine”.

The Committee does not have any specific recommendations on this subject. However, we do urge the Party to pay close attention to the criticisms highlighted by Liberal members. Despite the transformation of politics through technology and social media, a political party cannot achieve success without an enthusiastic and dedicated party base. The QLP has already taken steps to rebuild its base and organization, and these efforts must continue. The next leader must remain mindful of this base, without which victory will remain out of reach.

## Communications of the Party

Reviewing the feedback received regarding the Party’s communications is crucial, as important concerns in this area have been consistently raised by members and supporters during every Committee consultation.

The first concern was about the QLP’s responsiveness in both social and traditional media. Many participants pointed out that the Party takes a long time to take a public stance on current issues, and when it does, it is both unclear and not firm enough. One member from Chaudière-Appalaches stated:

*“We are acting too much like a government, and we are missing out on many opportunities to take a stand. We settle with insignificant releases like a single tweet or press release, without mobilizing external players to act as our spokespeople as part of a genuine communications strategy.”*

Furthermore, these supporters observed that while the Party may have sought to position itself so as to appeal to everyone, paradoxically it disappointed a large majority of people. This also made the Party look inauthentic. To overcome this issue, a Montérégie member believes that:

*“We need to move beyond typical political discourse and instead use a militant discourse that aligns more with our values and takes responsibility for them. Even though it may not be perfect initially, it will become more refined over time.”*

Many speakers on this subject have emphasized the importance of staying true to our values, even if it means upsetting certain commentators or voters. These members believe that we should be confident enough in our positions to stand by them with conviction and respond to any issue without fearing criticism. A liberal member from Montérégie summed it up perfectly: “We can only ignite the hearts of voters by speaking out fearlessly.” According to these participants, a party should rally behind projects they believe in rather than aimlessly trying to please everyone.

A large number of members who expressed concerns also emphasized the importance of contextual and organizational factors that have led to the emergence of the issues outlined above. They believe that we need to consider the broader context. As a member from the Eastern Townships noted:

*“In recent years, I have noticed that due to the numerous departures in the Party structure, we have faced improvisational situations that have backfired on us. We had some great ideas but lacked the time, resources, and credible spokespeople to develop and communicate them effectively.”*

All participants understand that our shortcomings do not result from a single trigger or specific group of people. Instead, it is a question of culture and approach that prevents us from making ourselves heard and better positioning ourselves in the public sphere.

## Organization and the Relationship with Members

Another recurring theme in the criticisms formulated towards the Party by its members is that of its organizational shortcomings. As this topic is closely linked to the relationship between the Party and its members, it seemed appropriate to integrate these two elements into a single synthesis.

During the vast majority of our consultations, both current and former volunteers mentioned that they felt taken for granted in the past few years. They have not felt human capital was

valued within the organization. Many of these participants identified this sentiment as one of the primary reasons to explain a decrease in motivation and engagement that we have observed since then. They felt that their opinions and efforts were disregarded and undervalued by those in positions of authority, and multiple negative experiences reinforced this feeling.

During discussions, a common theme that repeatedly emerged was related to the effectiveness of the National and regional Policy Committees. Many individuals expressed dissatisfaction regarding what happened with resolutions passed at our General Councils and Members' Conventions. They noted that these resolutions did not translate into tangible changes in the electoral platform or influence the stances taken by elected representatives. Criticism was also aimed at the fact that internal Party institutions, such as the National policy committee or local liberal associations, have often produced content that required significant labour yet was never implemented. According to the vast majority of speakers, this is why the Policy Committees and other Regional structures have experienced an exodus of members who were not seeing the effect of their efforts on the Party's positions.

Another important factor that came up in most of our consultations was the lack of preparation and the organization's tendency to procrastinate. The recruitment of candidates for the 2022 general election was repeatedly mentioned by members consulted as a prime example of this phenomenon. Moreover, they considered that there was a direct and causal link between the problems in recruiting candidates and the number of volunteers who were present during the campaign. As one member from the Laurentians pointed out, "Good candidates attract good volunteers."

It has become clear that many of our supporters and members have left our organization despite our efforts to retain them. This has led to a reduction in our capacity and strength. As a result, it has become increasingly difficult to maintain direct and human contact with our supporters, which has further eroded the sense of belonging for many members, including former Members of the National Assembly who have been with us for decades. People have suggested that the QLP needs to demonstrate its openness and dynamism to encourage those who have left to return and to attract new members to our cause.

## **A Solid Foundation**

Despite all the challenges expressed, the Committee has discovered a solid foundation of committed and resolute members dedicated to revitalizing the Party in every region of Québec. Our discussions with these members have given us great hope for the future of our party. If we put in the necessary effort, the Québec Liberal Party will regain its position on the political stage.

### Quebecers, Canadians, Liberals

During our committee's consultations, Liberal members stated loud and clear that the Québec Liberal Party has always defended and will continue to relentlessly defend the interests of Québec, above anything else. We are a political party independent of any other party, and we serve the people of Québec.

The QLP should not be afraid to assert its core values. On the contrary, we are proud Quebecers. We are proud Canadians. And we are committed Liberals, meaning that the freedom of people to live their lives as they see fit, while respecting one another, is at the heart of how we view politics.

It is because the party defends the interests of Quebecers that Liberals advocate belonging to the Canadian federation. For over 150 years, federalism has for the most part served Québec well. Within Canada, Québec has become one of the most prosperous, peaceful, and socially advanced nations in the world. Federalism has been positive for Québec.

For Liberals, Canada is neither a second-best option nor a political entity that should be accommodated, even less a foreign body. On the contrary, belonging to Canada contributes greatly to Québec's prosperity and development.

This does not mean that the Canadian system is free of any flaws. Federalism is constantly evolving. For Québec, being a part of the Canadian federation requires participating in this evolution and being at the table to defend Québec's vision. The liberal approach here is asserting ourselves as Quebecers AND as Canadians.

Thanks to Québec's leadership within the federation, the government of Canada officially recognizes that provinces have particular needs and issues that require distinct treatment by the federal government. This is known as asymmetrical federalism.

Over the past 20 years, Liberals have proven on multiple occasions that Québec can assert its interests within the Canadian federation and benefit from the advantages of the federal system. The Council of the Federation (established in 2003), the 2004 health agreement, the House of

Commons' recognition of Québec as a nation (2006) and the Canada-EU free trade agreement are all solid examples.

In this respect, the Liberal affirmation of Québec within the Canadian federation has followed two approaches: one based on collaboration with the other governments of the country and on achieving gains outside the Constitution, and one based on constitutional changes to the federal system. While the Liberals have recently favoured the first approach, they have always been careful to reflect on and update Québec's constitutional position.

Liberals have also shown that Québec can be autonomous on the international stage, furthering the Gérin-Lajoie doctrine that Québec is free to pursue foreign policy in all areas within its jurisdiction. Examples include the creation of Québec delegations abroad, Québec's participation in international organizations and summits, and the signing of agreements between Québec and sovereign or federated states.

## Challenges

The challenges Québec faces as regards to asserting itself have evolved considerably in recent years. Although the federalist-sovereignist dynamic once defined the Québec political spectrum, we are now witnessing its decline in favour of other political divides. Liberals must take full stock of this new reality and redefine an approach that reflects the party's history and values, and above all, place Liberals back at the heart of the political landscape.

New cleavages include the rise of the liberal-authoritarian divide as well as populism, renewed tensions between Ottawa and the western provinces, concerns about immigrant integration, and accommodating cultural and religious diversity.

Québec faces an uncertain and complex social, political, and international environment. This requires Québec to work on several fronts simultaneously, proposing policies that positively affirm its singular identity within Canada and in the world.

That being said, there are three main challenges that Québec must meet if it is to assert itself: the fight against economic and social withdrawal, maintaining its political weight in Canada, and making good use of the levers provided by Canadian federalism.



## **Fighting Economic and Social Withdrawal**

Cultural insecurity has been constant throughout Québec's history. Being a minority in Canada and North America requires constant vigilance in preserving and promoting the French language and Québec culture. Here, the main challenge is to ensure the long-term vitality of the French language without pushing out or excluding Anglo-Quebecers, Quebecers coming from cultural communities, members of First Nations, Inuit, and anyone else wishing to make a life for themselves in Québec. We need to ensure a social, cultural and economic environment where everyone can find their place, without unjustly restricting people's rights and freedoms.

Today's Québec is not the Québec of the 1950s. Young Quebecers now study and work internationally. Our companies have become multinationals, with markets all over the world. We welcome immigrants and temporary workers from French-speaking, English-speaking, and allophone countries who enrich Québec in every way. In this context, we need to promote French as a common language in a bold and ambitious way, increasing the resources available to newcomers to learn French, while enabling French-speaking Quebecers to learn and use, when necessary, the lingua franca that English has become.

In recent years, the policies of the current government have raised many concerns among English-speaking Quebecers. These concerns are legitimate and a government that governs for all Quebecers must take the necessary steps to reassure this community.

English-speaking Quebecers are Quebecers in their own right and have contributed greatly to building the Québec of today. This valuable contribution and their presence on Québec territory for over 250 years grants them rights that the French-speaking majority has a duty to respect and protect.

Our Committee believes that the existing rights of English-speaking Quebecers to services in their language and to control over their institutions should be more clearly affirmed by our laws, without undermining the protection and promotion of French as the official and common language of Québec.

## **Maintaining Québec's Political Weight**

Québec's political weight depends essentially on two factors: the size of its economy and the size of its population. In both cases, Québec is privileged with the second-largest economy and the second-largest population in the country. This explains why it exerts a significant influence within the Canadian federation.

However, Québec is facing a significant demographic decline, with its population increasing at a much slower rate than in other parts of the country. Québec's population is also aging faster compared to the rest of English Canada.

If Québec hopes to continue exerting significant political influence within the Canadian federation, it must maintain or even increase its current demographic weight, overcome its economic shortcomings, and work more closely with other provinces and the federal government.

Québec must also develop policies that will allow it to solidify its existence within Canada. Institutional arrangements must be put in place to ensure the survival of the French language and Québec culture, as well as its political influence on the Canadian federation. It can only maintain this influence if it makes proper use of the levers provided by Canadian federalism.

## **Federalism: a Winning Formula**

A federal state is characterized by the fact that its sovereignty relies on two levels of government: the federal state and the federated states. This division of sovereignty is organized in such a way that neither level is legally subordinate to the other. The provinces and the federal government are sovereign in the areas of jurisdiction assigned to them by the Canadian Constitution.

Federalism provides the provinces with several levers enabling them to be more prosperous and autonomous. It particularly enables them to preserve and promote a distinct culture; it allows a form of asymmetry that recognizes the realities and needs of different provinces; it enables them to implement foreign policy; it provides access to a major common market; and it fosters a greater capacity to adapt to global issues, particularly climate change, which ignores borders.

The main challenge here is not to lose sight of the principles on which federalism is based upon and, in so doing, the social, cultural, and economic levers it provides. When we lose sight of what federalism is and does, we encourage cultural, social, and economic isolation, and the decline of Québec's influence within the Canadian federation and the world.

## **The Liberal Approach**

The QLP remains the only true federalist party in Québec's National Assembly. Liberals are the only ones who believe that being a part of the Canadian federation greatly enhances Québec's economic prosperity and social and cultural development. We believe that Canada is not simply a larger political entity in which Québec participates; it is a fundamental dimension of Québec's identity.

In light of the challenges outlined above, the Liberal approach to affirmation is based on five basic ideas: Québec's leadership within the Canadian federation; collaboration and cooperation with the provinces; making gains outside of the Constitution; amending the Canadian Constitution; and pursuing an autonomous foreign policy.

## **Being a Leader Within the Canadian Federation**

Québec is stronger culturally, socially and economically when it plays a leadership role within the Canadian federation. Whether it's the fight against climate change, inequality or the protection and promotion of the French language, Québec must play a central role in the leadership and organization of the Canadian federation.

## **Collaborating and Cooperating with other Provinces**

By collaborating and cooperating closely with other provinces through the Council of the Federation and other interprovincial bodies, Québec can forge lasting partnerships, make significant gains, and improve the organization and operation of the federal system. This is the best way to avoid setbacks and decline, and to take advantage of all the levers federalism has to offer.

## **Making Gains Outside of the Constitution**

By pursuing an approach based on making gains outside the constitutional framework, Québec is giving itself the means to improve its financial situation, healthcare system, social programs, and immigration system, without resorting to cumbersome, time-consuming, and divisive constitutional mechanisms. With administrative agreements, recognition of the principle of asymmetry, and the creation of intergovernmental institutions, Québec can defend its interests and strengthen its status within the Canadian federation.

## **Amending the Canadian Constitution**

As well as making gains outside of the Constitution, Québec needs to think about how it can improve it. No political system is perfect and it's normal for a province to want to think about how to correct problems of the federal system. It should be noted that making gains outside the Constitution and amending the constitutional text are approaches that are complementary.

## An Autonomous International Policy

As long as it acts within its constitutional jurisdiction, Québec is entirely free to pursue an autonomous foreign policy with its major partners, within the Francophonie and elsewhere. Québec also promotes provincial participation in the negotiation of all agreements that concern their areas of jurisdiction, as well as their involvement in Canadian diplomatic actions that have a significant effect on the federation.

# Proposals

Based on the challenges facing Québec and the Liberal approach to affirmation, the Committee proposes several points to reflect on in order to achieve an inclusive and unifying Liberal project of affirmation. These points reflect the history and values of the QLP.

## Adoption of a Québec Constitution

- 1. According to the Committee, the QLP should consider drafting a Québec constitution, i.e., a document that brings together the constitutional rules, standards and conventions governing Québec, and that explicitly states Québec's values and identity. We note that the Youth Commission adopted a resolution to this effect during its 2019 Congress.**

The Québec Constitution should affirm Québec's existence as a nation within the Canadian federation, the status of French as an official and common language, the fundamental rights and freedoms of Quebecers, and the contribution of cultural communities.

The existing rights of the English-speaking community to education and health services in English, and to have control over their institutions, should be clearly recognized in the Québec Constitution.

The rights of Québec's First Nations and Inuit should also be recognized. This part of the Constitution should obviously be drafted in close collaboration with the Nations that are concerned.

It would also be appropriate to include Québec's model of integration and management of cultural diversity, interculturalism, so that Québec may define once and for all the principles and

conditions under which it integrates newcomers and how it manages diversity. The adoption of an Interculturalism Act, discussed below, would be a first step in this direction.

There are four reasons why the Committee recommends drafting a Québec Constitution. First, as a strong gesture of national affirmation, it would contribute to Québec's sustainability within the Canadian federation. It would represent an indispensable foundation for ensuring Québec's cultural and linguistic vitality as well as its political weight. Moreover, it does not imply confrontation with the federal government or the other provinces, nor the separation of Québec. As we know, the existence of provincial constitutions is recognized by the British North America Act, the basis of the Constitution of Canada. A Québec Constitution would strengthen Québec's existence as a liberal, democratic nation within Canada.

Second, the Constitution would help address the cultural and linguistic concerns of Quebecers. As the only French-speaking jurisdiction in Canada and North America, Québec must be constantly vigilant in linguistic matters, and from this point of view, the Constitution would strengthen Québec's linguistic foundations without restricting fundamental rights and freedoms.

Third, from a liberal perspective, the Constitution would entrench the rights of English-speaking Quebecers, guaranteeing their existing rights to English-language services and control of their educational and health institutions. It would provide additional guarantees that the rights and freedoms of cultural and linguistic minorities would be respected by the Québec government. It would also strengthen the existing partnership between the Québec nation and the 11 Indigenous nations of the territory.

Fourth, the Québec Constitution would solidify the principles found in constitutional, legislative, and legal documents that are considered fundamental to Québec society, such as the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms, the Charter of the French Language, the Election Act, the National Assembly Act, and the Executive Act.

In short, the Québec Constitution would contribute to Québec's cultural, linguistic, and political sustainability within the Canadian federation, as well as providing an inclusive project which Quebecers can identify themselves with and refer to.

During constitutional negotiations, Québec would naturally demand that the Québec Constitution be explicitly recognized within the Constitution of Canada.

## Towards a Preferential Voting System

A reform of the voting system has been the subject of numerous promises and studies by the various parties represented in the National Assembly. We therefore understand the public's skepticism. Nonetheless, a reform is essential if Quebecers are to be better represented in their Parliament and encouraged to fully participate in the democratic process of elections.

### **2. The QLP should seriously consider introducing a preferential voting system. Quebecers should be given the opportunity to vote on this issue.**

The preferential voting system, in which voters rank the candidates by order of preference on their ballots, has many advantages: it does not require changes to the electoral map, it does not risk leading to an undue multiplication of the number of parties in the National Assembly, and it allows third parties to be better represented.

## Québec must control temporary immigration

### **3. A Liberal government should work with Ottawa to clarify the Canada–Québec Accord relating to Immigration and Temporary Admission of Aliens (the McDougall-Gagnon-Tremblay Accord) in order to extend the jurisdiction of the Québec government on the entry of all temporary foreign workers, including those coming through the International Mobility Program.**

In recent years, the number of temporary immigrants settling in Québec has been on the rise, as in the rest of the country. In the third quarter of 2023, nearly 471,000 non-permanent residents were in Québec, 148,000 more (+46%) than a year earlier<sup>3</sup>.

Some of these non-permanent residents are refugees; the selection of these asylum seekers is a shared responsibility between Ottawa and Québec.

The other temporary immigrants are either workers or students. Regarding students in our colleges and universities, the Québec government is able to control the number and their qualifications, thanks to the fact that each student must obtain a Québec Acceptance Certificate before obtaining a study permit.

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Statistics Canada, Estimates of the number of non-permanent residents by type, Table 17-10-0121-01

As for temporary workers, under the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, each worker is required to have a Québec Acceptance Certificate before being admitted to the province. We know how essential these workers are, especially in the agricultural sector.

Thus, Québec has several levers to ensure that temporary immigration continues to have a positive impact on our economy and society.

However, though it is a significant program for temporary workers, the International Mobility Program is beyond the control of the Québec government. As the number of these workers is growing (43,000 admitted in 2021)<sup>4</sup>, the Canada-Québec Agreement on immigration should be clarified to specify that all temporary workers must be accepted by Québec before they can settle in the province.

## The Rights of English-speaking Quebecers

- 4. Until the Québec Constitution is enacted, the English-speaking community's existing rights to healthcare and social services in English, and their right to manage their educational and health institutions should be clearly recognized by the relevant laws.**

In particular, the Education Act should preserve the English-speaking community's control over its school system, in accordance with the August 2023 ruling of the Superior Court of Québec<sup>5</sup>.

## Promoting a House of the Provinces

- 5. The Committee believes that Québec should work with its provincial and federal partners to reform the Canadian Senate.**

Although the Senate was founded to represent regional interests and provide a careful review of “sober second thought” to bills coming from the House of Commons, the Senate is not adequately fulfilling its mission.

The Upper House almost always votes in favour of bills originating in the House of Commons. When the Senate proposes substantial amendments, they are usually rejected by the government.

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4 [https://cdn-contenu.quebec.ca/cdn-contenu/immigration/publications/fr/recherches-statistiques/Portraits\\_Immigration\\_Temporaire\\_2015\\_2021.pdf](https://cdn-contenu.quebec.ca/cdn-contenu/immigration/publications/fr/recherches-statistiques/Portraits_Immigration_Temporaire_2015_2021.pdf)

5 <http://t.souq.quebec.ca/Yr2q3>

The fact that senators are appointed by the federal government reinforces the idea that the Senate suffers from a lack of democratic legitimacy. Yet, along with the House of Commons, the Senate is at the heart of Canadian democracy.

Québec should put forward a reform of the Senate that would enable it to fulfill its mission as a truly democratic institution, where provincial interests would be properly represented.

Québec should thus recommend transforming the Senate into a House of the Provinces, with representatives of the provincial and territorial parliaments, so that provinces and territories can participate directly in the federal legislative process and in the administration of the Canadian federation. This house should include First Nations and Inuit representatives.

Transforming the Senate into a House of the Provinces would have several advantages. First of all, by granting Québec a number of seats that reflects its historical demographic weight (25% would be the minimum acceptable threshold), it would maintain and even strengthen Québec's status and influence on the organization and governance of the Canadian federation.

It would also achieve a better balance between the provinces, responsible for the day-to-day governance of the federation, and the federal government, ensuring cohesion and solidarity within the country. In this sense, a House of the Provinces would better reflect the spirit of Canadian federalism and, above all, the sharing of sovereignty between the two levels of government.

Finally, the House of the Provinces would be a great place for collaboration, cooperation, and solidarity between Québec, the other provinces, and the federal government. As a result, the democratic deficit in Canada's political institutions would be reduced and the federal system would be improved.

Such a change would take a long time to achieve, especially as there is currently little appetite in the country for opening constitutional negotiations. Nevertheless, if we are ever to reach the end of the road, we need to take the first steps.

Of course, as part of any constitutional negotiations, a QLP-led government would demand other changes to the country's fundamental law, including "Québec's traditional demands", updated to today's context:

- recognition of Québec as a distinct nation;
- limits on federal spending power;
- Québec's participation in the process of appointing its three representatives to the Supreme Court of Canada;



- a veto power over constitutional amendments;
- and constitutional entrenchment of the Canada-Québec agreement on immigration.

## Becoming a Leader in the Canadian and Global Francophonie

Among the members of the international Francophonie, Québec has an enviable reputation. Whether in terms of its educational institutions, its standard of living, its economic vitality or the stability of its political system, Québec plays a leading role in the Canadian and global Francophonie.

### **6. The committee believes that Québec should renew its policy on the Canadian Francophonie and adopt measures that will enable it to play a genuine leadership role in the global Francophonie.**

Renewing Québec’s Policy on the Canadian Francophonie should enhance the current policy by creating a network of “Québec Centers” in provinces with a significant number of Francophones. The purpose of this network would be to promote the French language and Québec culture, support people wishing to pursue university or professional studies in Québec, and establish a Québec network of business associations in major Canadian cities.

### **7. Given the significant challenges facing Canada’s Francophones, Québec should initiate discussions with Francophone associations in the rest of the country on the opportunity of holding “États généraux”<sup>6</sup> of the Canadian Francophonie.**

In addition, Québec should engage in negotiations with French-speaking states with the goal of reaching agreements on workforce mobility similar to the Québec-France Agreement.

We know that the International Organisation of La Francophonie (OIF) is going through a serious crisis of effectiveness, credibility, and legitimacy.

### **8. Along with the Canadian government and other provincial governments, the Québec government should be fully committed to revitalizing the OIF.**

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6 « États Généraux » refers to multi-stakeholder forums that foster deliberation and consensus-building among diverse societal sectors including government, civil society, and business.

### A Québec for All

Québec is a mature, pluralist society which, as we have said, faces a number of current and future challenges. In the face of these challenges, the role of the State is to provide equal opportunities for all, without interfering in the private lives of citizens.

At the Québec Liberal Party, we believe that the best way to achieve this goal is to ensure that all Quebecers are included in the vision of society that we are putting forward, regardless of their personal or social characteristics.

Québec is strong when it's united. This explains why we advocate a unifying nationalism that promotes the French language, defends the fundamental rights of citizens, and ensures the religious neutrality of the state.

### A Unifying Nationalism

Québec's distinct identity is what sets it apart from any other province within Canada. Therefore, questions relating to who we are as a nation remain highly legitimate and relevant in Québec's public sphere.

Our collective history means that we in Québec have chosen to claim a distinct status within Canada instead of being treated "like any other province". When these two visions confronted one another, the Québec Liberal Party chose asymmetry, a principle that was recognized by our federal and provincial partners in the rest of the country. We still stand by this vision.

There is no doubt that, true to our history, we are a nationalist party. Any Liberal Premier must prioritize Québec's interests, in the event of a divergence of interests with the federal government and that of any other Canadian. We are committed to the fact that Québec nationalism aims to affirm and promote the attributes of Quebecers with a perspective of political and social promotion of our culture, our language, and our history. Initiated under Liberal Premier Jean Lesage with the Quiet Revolution, the building of modern Québec has enabled the collective empowerment of Quebecers in both economic matters and identity.

Throughout our rich history, there have been different currents of nationalism in Québec, according to the era and depending on the needs and aspirations of Quebecers. Whether survivalist or ultramontane, reformist or progressive, these forms of nationalism have been the subject of healthy debate and have had their supporters and opponents within Québec itself. Nevertheless, over the last half-century, the prevailing form of nationalism, regardless of partisan allegiance, has been a civic, open and confident nationalism. Even though Québec has always been made up of individuals from a variety of demographic backgrounds, the political debate in Québec since the 1960s has focused solely on linguistic and constitutional issues when it comes to identity. The political parties represented in the National Assembly of Québec have largely shared the same vision of integrating newcomers and coexisting among Quebecers, going well beyond folklore. Opinions on this matter might differ on an individual basis within the population, but this was not a partisan nor an ideological fault line in Québec politics. It is undeniable that this situation has changed over the last ten years.

The Québec Liberal Party must therefore clearly state its vision of nationalism and of cohabitation, at a time when the post-referendum political landscape brings about a realignment of political forces on this issue. Faced with the rise of a conservative, defensive type of nationalism that freezes our collective identity in the past, we still claim to be part of the major current of nationalism which has led to the success of modern Québec. Liberal nationalism is modern, pluralist, inclusive and unifying. It is driven by a sense of responsibility for Québec's economic and social progress and believes that living together underpins such development in the 21st century. It is based, within the economic sphere, on the development of Québec's expertise, and approaches Québec's challenges from the perspective of its place and interactions on the North American and international scene, rather than thinking of Québec in strictly local terms.

Liberal nationalism is Québécois, meaning that it is rooted in the linguistic and cultural particularities of our collective experience. It promotes the French language and sets itself apart from an interchangeable, disembodied universalism. Liberal nationalism is also Québécois in the sense that its point of reference is the evolving Québécois identity as held by citizens of all regions and origins.

When trade-offs have to be made between the collective and individual rights of Quebecers, the Québec Liberal Party takes into account the impact of the measure on individuals and communities, liberal principles, protections offered by the Canadian and Québec Charters of Rights and Freedoms, and the impact of the situation on social harmony. In our view, recourse to the notwithstanding provisions of the charters is legitimate, provided that it is done in a prudent and circumscribed manner, that it stems from a court decision, and that the government is able to justify it by the seriousness and exceptional nature of the situation, notably its duty to preserve social peace.

Our convictions lead us to believe that the government in power since 2018 is appropriating the term “nationalist” without defining it, flippantly fuelling distinctions between Quebecers, unduly restricting Quebecers’ rights and freedoms, and nurturing a harmful social climate by putting forward retrenchment, populism and paternalistic positions. We believe that Québec cannot continue to go down this short-sighted path.

That being said, there is no doubt that a legitimate preoccupation regarding the future of the French language and culture has emerged in recent years. We do not shy away from this observation, and we offer a number of ideas rooted in our liberal values, aimed at uniting all citizens around Québec identity. Indeed, we believe it must be part of the Québec Liberal Party’s updated mandate to promote the vision of nationalism outlined above, and to create a model of harmonious coexistence that is enviable throughout the world.

## Challenges

### Protection of the French Language

We face new challenges in protecting the French language. When the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (the Laurendeau-Dunton Commission) published its report in the late 1960s, it confirmed the obvious with unprecedented data: according to statistics in 1961, French-speaking Quebecers were one of the lowest-paid groups in Canada, just ahead of Quebecers of Italian origin and Indigenous peoples. At the time, the language issue was, and rightfully so, inextricably linked to the socio-economic status of French-speaking Quebecers. However, according to the Office québécois de la langue française, in 2015, Francophones earned a higher median income (\$35,566) than Anglophones (\$33,412) and Allophones (\$29,851)<sup>7</sup>.

French-speaking Quebecers are climbing the ranks and finding themselves at the head of numerous public and private organizations. They are creating global-scale businesses. We have won our bet. We are now “Maitres chez nous”.

That being said, while we can be proud of the extraordinary socio-economic progress we have made, the issue of protecting the French language remains. Beyond ensuring the political and socio-economic well-being of Québec’s Francophones, we must ensure that French maintains its status as a common language in the public space.

This is a major challenge in a globalized context. Indeed, the linguistic accommodations put in

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Office québécois de la langue française, information sheet, *Portrait du revenu d'emploi au Québec en 2015 selon les langues utilisées au travail*, 2022

place in Québec since the Quiet Revolution have always, quite rightly, focused on ensuring that the language spoken by a majority of Quebecers in their private lives is put forward in the public space, due to the sociolinguistic dynamics operating on our territory. The previous objectives of our linguistic regime were to ensure that Francophones, who already exclusively spoke French in private, could take control of the public space, benefit from services - health, education - in French, and be able to work and consume goods and services in French, without learning English being seen as a necessary condition for one's success. In Québec, we made French our official language in 1974, and established language rights to promote the individual and collective development of French-speaking Quebecers. Coupled with economic development projects that have created jobs in French and empowered all Quebecers, these rights have become the foundation of Québec's gains as a nation.

Today, these linguistic accommodations are vulnerable in the context of globalization, a new reality which has improved the quality of life of Quebecers and their contemporaries, giving the Québec population access to the world with just a few clicks. We therefore need to reconsider these accommodations in this context of fragmenting cultural references, so that two seemingly contradictory truths coexist: in effect, French is progressing in Québec, and English is progressing in Québec. French is progressing thanks to the legislative and regulatory framework that has, according to empirical data, led to a steady increase in the knowledge of French in Québec since 1971. The vast majority of the population understands that proficiency in French is a prerequisite for professional and social fulfillment in the Québec ecosystem. Our linguistic policies make French an essential language for social advancement in Québec's internal market.

At the same time, English is progressing due to its strong appeal, no longer as a means of local domination, but because it is generally necessary to use it in the context of developing international business partnerships, English being the current lingua franca. The other contributing factor is the acceleration of American culture's international expansion across many markets, including our own, due to the rise of new technologies.

The rate of individual bilingualism has therefore increased from English to French for local reasons (which is why English-speaking Quebecers are the most bilingual English-French speakers in Canada), while individual bilingualism has increased from French to English for extraterritorial reasons. Nowadays in Montréal, it's true that access to a job that combines competitive remuneration and social capital in the private sector reasonably goes hand in hand with proficiency in English, in addition to proficiency in French. However, this is generally the case in order to break into markets outside of Québec, as is increasingly seen elsewhere in the world, and no longer in order to communicate with a unilingual English-speaking management, as was once the case in our collective history. As power dynamics between the two groups have levelled, it still means that the increased individual bilingualism of Francophones normalizes the

presence of English in the public sphere, increases the demand for Anglophone cultural goods and reduces the expectations of the population, especially the younger generation, regarding the compliance of companies and service providers with the current legislative and regulatory linguistic framework.

Faced with the global appeal of the United States and its culture, which also affects Québec due to its proximity, the custodians of minority languages and cultures face a major challenge. In Québec, we share with our counterparts the mandate to assess the importance of the linguistic issue and to raise public awareness about the relevance of granting it political legitimacy. However, we differ from our counterparts, particularly in Europe, whose vernacular languages are in contact with a multitude of equally significant national languages; in Québec, we have a close dynamic with only one other national language, English. We therefore have a particular responsibility to preserve French, so that it remains both a vector of common culture and the predominant language in Québec's public sphere.

## Secularism

Secularism represents another challenge related to Québec's identity. The principle of the religious neutrality of the State has been in place since the Quiet Revolution, but its implementation continues to generate controversy. This is particularly the case because the current government has chosen to restrict the religious freedom of certain Quebecers who wish to publicly express their faith without proselytizing. However, Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights clearly states that freedom of religion includes "freedom, either alone or in a community with others and in public or private, to manifest one's religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance". The infringement of this internationally recognized right is, therefore, not trivial.

Unfortunately, the Liberals' concerns on this subject are dismissed on the grounds that the majority of Quebecers agree with Bill 21. However, this is the worst argument to use when it comes to minority rights. Implemented with respect for diversity, the religious neutrality of the State should not erase religions but bring Quebecers together beyond and with respect for their different beliefs.

# The Liberal Approach

The Liberal approach to bringing Quebecers together is based on four pillars: French as the cornerstone of Québec identity and social cohesion; interculturalism as a model of integration and coexistence; pluralist, liberal secularism; and the search for partnerships with the First Nations and Inuit.

## French as the Cornerstone of Québec Identity and Social Cohesion

As the cornerstone of Québec identity, the French language is the element around which Québec's social, economic and political life revolves. It contains all the emotional significance associated with Québec identity. It also serves as the main mode of communication and interaction in the public sphere. In this sense, it plays an essential civic role in supporting and maintaining social cohesion.

It is the responsibility of Quebecers, and the Québec State in particular, to ensure the transmission and promotion of the French language, while respecting the rights of the English-speaking community, as well as allophones, Indigenous people, Inuit, and their languages.

English, foreign languages and Indigenous languages are neither obstacles nor threats to the survival of French. They are integral parts of Québec identity and are intended to remain so, as long as French remains the common public language.

## Interculturalism as a Model for Integration and Coexistence

The liberal approach to integration and coexistence has long been based on the idea that Québec forms a democratic and liberal nation in which various communities coexist peacefully, including the French-speaking majority, the English-speaking community, allophones and cultural communities, First Nations and Inuit.

From this idea stems a model of integration and coexistence: interculturalism. This model is built upon the notion that there is a common public culture in Québec, primarily based on the French language and its associated Francophone culture, as well as a number of principles that underpin the integration of newcomers and our coexistence.

The principles on which the intercultural approach is based include: French as the common

public language and cultural exchange; respect for fundamental rights and freedoms; respect for the existing rights of English-speaking Quebecers; connections between the Francophone majority, cultural and linguistic minorities, and, ultimately, all Quebecers.

## **Liberal Pluralistic Secularism as a Model for the Coexistence of Religious Faiths and Beliefs**

The secularism on which the liberal approach is based takes interculturalism into account, particularly the fact that there is a common Francophone public culture, and that rights and freedoms and cultural harmonization practices must be respected.

Created to provide a mode of governance by which the State can organize the coexistence of beliefs, secularism aims to ensure freedom of conscience, moral equality, the separation of church and state, and the non-denominational neutrality of the state. In short, it aims to provide a space in which different moral, religious and philosophical conceptions of human existence can coexist freely and peacefully.

## **The Relationship with the First Nations and Inuit**

In today's context, we cannot discuss the notion of coexistence and reconciliation without considering the Nation-to-Nation relationships that must prevail between Quebecers and Indigenous peoples. Any future Liberal policy must pay particular attention to the updated identity needs of the members of the various Indigenous communities, who wish to have their ancestral territory and traditional activities recognized, and to perpetuate their respective languages and cultures.

Indigenous peoples want to participate in the management of the land. In addition to measures aimed at fair exploitation of natural and territorial resources, we must work to ensure access to public services provided by the Québec government to these communities, such as access to justice, the right to culturally adapted education, and access to equitable healthcare and social services that align with the principle of cultural security.

A series of inquiries<sup>8</sup> have made hundreds of recommendations and calls to action. The current government is slow to respond to these recommendations. Not only does it not want to

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8 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1991), Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2008-2015), National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (2016-2018), Inquiry Commission on relations between Indigenous Peoples and certain public services in Quebec - Viens Commission (2017-2019).



acknowledge the existence of systemic racism, but it also refuses to adopt the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The QLP must continue to defend the interests of Indigenous communities so that Québec prospers for all and by all.

- 9. The Committee believes that the QLP must commit to recognizing the shortcomings of the current government systems and work in partnership with First Nations and Inuit to develop their capacity for autonomy and assert their determination to shape the future of the next generations.**

The QLP has demonstrated its ability to negotiate Nation-to-Nation agreements. The Party must continue its work with Indigenous leaders to improve the educational services available in communities for the numerous Indigenous young people of today. To achieve this, we must maximize the self-generated revenues of First Nations and Inuit and thereby continue to create the jobs and benefits necessary to their full development.

In recent years, we have also witnessed tensions between Indigenous peoples and residents of certain municipalities. The QLP must improve the integration of Indigenous peoples in urban areas and establish real foundations for harmonious cohabitation.

## Proposals

### Adopting a Law on Interculturalism

- 10. The Committee suggests that the QLP should explore the possibility of enacting legislation on interculturalism. This legislation would outline the principles and criteria for incorporating newcomers, embracing cultural diversity, and fostering harmonious coexistence.**

The law on interculturalism should explicitly state the idea that Québec is an intercultural society where there is a common public culture, based on the French language, culture, history and Québécois values, as well as a diversity of cultures.

Specifically, this legislation should enshrine the following principles: the promotion of French as a shared public language and cultural interchange; the safeguarding of rights and freedoms; the preservation of a French-speaking culture; the facilitation of closer ties between the French-speaking majority and the English-speaking community, cultural communities, First Nations,

and Inuit; and the encouragement of practices that foster cultural harmony.

This law should also reaffirm the existing rights of the English-speaking community, especially in education, health and social services. It should recognize the contribution of cultural communities and the special status of Indigenous nations.

The Committee proposes the enactment of such a law for several reasons. Primarily, it would definitively establish the principles guiding the integration of new arrivals. Despite the Québec government having implemented various immigration policies and laws over the years, it has never truly formalized the fundamental principles regarding integration of newcomers.

Insofar as Québec is essentially responsible for integrating newcomers, whether in terms of housing, employment, education, health, etc., it is more than normal for Québec to have an integration policy with clearly defined parameters.

Second, it presents an inclusive vision of Québec society that resonates with everyone. By delineating the parameters of a public culture grounded in French, Québec's history and culture, and the enrichment brought by cultural diversity, it offers a vision that accommodates the entirety of society without exclusion or negation of the richness found in diversity.

Third, it circumvents reliance on the courts, where individuals and groups often find themselves in adversarial positions. Through the promotion of cultural harmonization practices, interculturalism advocates for a conflict resolution and accommodation approach centred on individual autonomy and the pursuit of compromise.

Fourth, by giving paramount importance to the respect for rights and freedoms, interculturalism mandates that any laws or public policies concerning the integration and accommodation of diversity that restrict upon the rights and freedoms of Quebecers must be grounded in explicit, compelling reasons, and supported by empirical data.

## **French, an ESG Criterion**

The development of French in Québec should be a matter of corporate social responsibility (CSR). Companies doing business in Québec are subject to legal linguistic obligations in terms of language of work, normal course of business (including contractual language), corporate name and consumer communications (such as signage and labelling). These obligations are serious and always applicable. However, the business world has evolved over the last few years to include environmental, social and governance (ESG) factors. Beyond merely managing reputational

risk, for a modern generation of entrepreneurs, including those in Québec, the role that their company plays in society is integrated into their business processes and decisions. However, this particular cohort of Québec entrepreneurs often goes beyond mere compliance with legislative and regulatory requirements when addressing third-party issues, yet falls short in incorporating the language question into their social perspective. At a time when the concept of CSR is set to broaden for the next generation of private-sector entrepreneurs, a liberal approach to revitalizing the French language involves associating its protection with the ESG criteria of Québec companies. This aims to cultivate a business ecosystem that treats the preservation of the French language in Québec as a performance benchmark.

**11. The Committee suggests that the QLP reflect on strong measures that could be taken to encourage companies, as part of their social responsibility practices, to increase the presence of French in their workplaces, and to do more to integrate immigrant workers in French.**

## Focusing on the French-speaking World

To enhance the appeal of the French language as an international language for cultural and commercial interactions, it is imperative to bolster the vibrancy of Québec's political, economic, academic, and cultural collaborations within the global Francophonie. In an economy that is progressively dematerialized — increasingly combining the supply of services with the manufacturing of goods — the competitive presence of Québec entrepreneurs in French-speaking markets is a successful strategy for ensuring the enduring survival of the French language in the long term. French is the world's third business language. The global French-speaking market is growing and could double by 2050. Québec has everything to gain from a strengthened economic Francophonie and must capitalize on the strength of its network and seize this opportunity to assert its uniqueness within French-speaking markets. Sustaining the vibrancy of the French language in Québec necessitates, among other factors, an economic Francophonie. Engaging in international trade in French should present our entrepreneurs with as many, if not more, opportunities than trading in English, leveraging Québec's substantial competitive advantage in this strategic market.

Beyond capitalizing on the opportunities presented by economic Francophonie, nurturing national and international alliances in French also entails promoting the diffusion of French culture and knowledge. On the one hand, we need to support the international distribution of our cultural productions and expand the market for our artisans. Conversely, there is a need to allocate more generous grants to fund university research in French and streamline collaborative research initiatives and mobility among researchers from French-speaking communities in

Canada and abroad. Québec must serve as the catalyst for a virtuous cycle in French-language research within the Francophone higher education network. As French-language research gains recognition globally, it becomes more professionally rewarding for researchers, especially in applied sciences, to publish their work in French. This creates a positive feedback loop that reinforces the prominence and impact of French-language research. The more they publish in French, the more it will be possible for our higher education institutions to offer teaching materials in French to the next generation. The more knowledge is transmitted in French, the greater the reputation of French-language research around the world. Beyond the university milieu, why not also accentuate partnerships between our College Centres for the Transfer of Technology (CCTTs), present throughout Québec, and the relevant interlocutors within the Francophonie? Our CCTTs are already acting as catalysts for innovation, playing a pivotal role in the socio-economic development of both Québec and Canada.

**12. There is much to gain by showcasing our local expertise across a multitude of fields, and we already hold an esteemed reputation among numerous French-speaking players.**

When it comes to expertise, Québec is the world's champion of French lexicology and terminology. Since Robert Bourassa's Bill 22 established terminology commissions, we have had the resources to develop French neologisms as words referring to new technologies come into use. And our terms can be exported. The Québec terminology model has served other minority language communities around the world, but little is being done to deploy its content within the French-speaking world, even though Québec is not the only state to have language management bodies. French is alive and well on the global stage, propelled by younger populations rather than aging ones. Investing in this momentum can only be advantageous for Québec.

## **In-Depth Reform of French Language Teaching**

**13. In the Committee's view, the QLP should develop a comprehensive reform of French language education.**

While the Charter of the French Language is an essential linguistic tool, it alone cannot guarantee the growth, development, and sustainability of the language, particularly in ensuring that all Quebecers acquire fundamental language skills. In effect, French can only survive if all Quebecers have equal opportunities to learn to read and write, including grammar, syntax and spelling.

Unfortunately, a significant portion of the population struggles in this regard. According to the Literacy Foundation, one in five individuals (19%) faces significant challenges in reading

and writing, and less than half (46.8%) possess the literacy skills to learn, comprehend, and act independently<sup>9</sup>.

This is not a fault of parents, teachers, or ill intent. Rather, there is an issue with the way French is taught, and it is imperative to address this by implementing necessary measures to ensure that all Quebecers attain proficiency in French.

Therefore, the Committee proposes the development of a comprehensive reform in French language education, drawing from the recommendations outlined in the *Rapport du comité d'experts sur l'apprentissage de l'écriture* (2008)<sup>10</sup> and the *Rapport du comité d'expertes sur la maîtrise du français au collégial* (2022)<sup>11</sup>.

## A Renewed Perspective on Education

### **14. From this perspective, we believe that those who have the daily responsibility of teaching our children must have their role as cultural mediators and socialization agents fully recognized and valued by the Québec government.**

As we all know, this position is not new: it has been part of the teacher training curriculum for over 20 years. We note, however, that the expression of these professional skills is too often hindered by a lack of autonomy and sufficient resources.

Faithful to our values of individual freedom and personal emancipation, we Liberals have everything it takes to propose a concrete plan capable of giving genuine professional autonomy to educators whose vocation is to socialize and qualify pupils. Such autonomy, encumbered at this moment by a bureaucracy that stifles initiative and pedagogical innovation, must be at the heart of our priorities for education. A Liberal government should also empower teachers with the means to create enriching school experiences, by expanding their ability to act and by increasing the entire school system's budget.

What's more, we need to make people want to train as teachers again or come back to teaching. This needs to be achieved not only by making the profession more attractive, but also by making the professional experience more stimulating and engaging. To achieve this, we need to provide schools with the resources they need to hire essential support staff and give them greater

9 <https://fondationalphabetisation.org/lanalphabetisme-les-enquetes-et-statistiques/>

10 [http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/site\\_web/documents/dpse/formation\\_jeunes/Amelioration-FrancaisSoutenirDeveloppementCompetenceEcrire.pdf](http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/site_web/documents/dpse/formation_jeunes/Amelioration-FrancaisSoutenirDeveloppementCompetenceEcrire.pdf)

11 <https://cdn-contenu.quebec.ca/cdn-contenu/adm/min/education/publications-adm/enseignement-superieur/Rapport-maitrise-francais-collegial.pdf>

recognition. Furthermore, in order to support the next generation of educators that society is desperately in need of, it is imperative to enable teaching candidates to develop professionally under viable conditions through paid internships.

**15. This commitment to the teaching profession must also translate into better funding for school infrastructure and increased support for schools in disadvantaged areas, which, it must be noted, must contend with distinct realities and problems.**

In particular, the role of cultural facilitator is often hampered by a lack of resources and difficult choices that our educators should not have to make. Many teachers have to pay out of their own pockets for materials and to implement engaging educational activities, even in more privileged environments. Therefore, it is crucial to provide teachers with the tools and means to enable all students, and particularly those from recent immigrant backgrounds, to acquire the knowledge and experience they need to fully integrate into Québec society.

Moreover, just as Québec schools should not only be a place for information transmission, so too should government-supported francization efforts not be limited to basic language skills. They must also provide newcomers with the means to integrate fully into Québec's socio-cultural space. This learning must be culturally rooted and accompanied by opportunities to experience Québec's artistic and cultural expressions, accessible to French learners. This could be achieved through programs of cultural visits throughout the province, enabling new Quebecers to better know and understand their new home.

**16. In the Committee's view, the Québec Liberal Party should develop a renewed and expanded philosophy for Québec's schools. One that sees the teacher as a custodian, mediator, and transmitter of common socio-cultural references. This should be achieved within the framework of a collective social project capable of energizing Québec's educational sector and supporting teachers in their vocation.**

## Measuring Québec's Ability to Receive and Integrate Immigrants Independently

In Québec, immigration planning takes into account its immigration policy, the demand for immigration, its needs — including those of its regions — as well as its ability to receive and integrate immigrants. However, it has never been objectively defined and does not take into account the growing number of foreign nationals staying in Québec on a temporary basis. As

a result, the question of the reception and integration of immigrants has often been exploited for political ends, and is the subject of vigorous debate, particularly in electoral contexts. By arbitrarily setting the limits of said ability, we fall into a never-ending debate, one that wearies and confuses the population. In addition, by establishing artificial thresholds that do not take temporary immigration into account, we are perpetuating a sterile debate.

Ideological positions on the ability to receive and integrate immigrants are of no benefit to any Quebecer and undermine our ability to live together.

**17. In order to pacify the debate, the Liberal Party should propose amending Québec's Immigration Act, thereby establishing a committee of independent experts tasked with measuring Québec's ability for reception and integration prior to the government's multi-year immigration plan.**

The chairman and members of the committee of experts could be appointed by the National Assembly, upon approval by two thirds of the MNAs, in order to preserve these experts' independence and impartiality while performing their duties. The committee would thus report to the National Assembly rather than to the government.



### Economic Development, Social Justice and the Environment

Economic development is the backbone of the Québec Liberal Party's vision. For Liberals, Québec is only prosperous if it creates the economic, social and environmental conditions in which Quebecers can create wealth and realize their personal and professional ambitions. In our view, economic development is not an end in itself; it is the essential condition for our development as a distinct, prosperous, just and sustainable nation.

Since the Quiet Revolution, the Liberal approach to prosperity has focused on two fronts. An economic front, which is based on responsible management of public finances and a wealth-creation strategy that relies primarily on private initiative. The second social front seeks to ensure that everyone has equal opportunities to flourish. A third front has now been added: environmental protection and the fight against climate change, without which economic and social prosperity are impossible in the long term.

The fight against climate change is not only about protecting the environment, but also about economic development and social justice. Indeed, as we are increasingly aware, the effects of global warming are damaging the economy and hitting vulnerable populations hardest.

What distinguishes the Liberals from other political parties when it comes to prosperity is the constant search for this complementarity between economic development, social justice and environmental protection.

## The Challenges

Québec has been marked by profound upheavals over the past 20 years. Above all, environmental protection and the fight against climate change have become the main concerns for citizens and government policies in Canada and around the world. Local and international climate disasters have become more frequent and more devastating.



Moreover, Québec's population has experienced significant demographic growth in recent years, mainly due to a marked increase in temporary immigration. However, this growth remains lower than that recorded in the rest of Canada, and all indications are that the trend will continue for the foreseeable future. What's more, as the population ages, the proportion of working-age Quebecers will decline over the coming decades. This will slow economic growth and exacerbate labour shortages. Government revenues, which enable the State to fulfill its essential missions, will also decline.

Although the effects of the 2008 economic crisis were less damaging in Québec than in many other regions of the world, it did highlight the financial markets' fragility, as well as that of our social safety net. The 2020 health crisis also exacerbated the social inequalities experienced by vulnerable persons and minority groups, in areas such as education, health, work, housing and food security.

Beginning in 2021, rising prices significantly impacted both the middle class and the underprivileged. The effects of inflation are particularly felt in the housing sector, where higher material costs and rising interest rates are slowing down new home constructions, as well as increasing rental and selling prices at a time when demand is particularly strong.

Québec will also have to rise to the challenge of the energy transition. The electrification of energy sources, particularly for transport, will require an increase in electricity production from sustainable sources. According to Hydro-Québec, electricity demand will increase by 20 terawatt-hours by 2029<sup>12</sup>. How will we meet this demand? Québec will have to make choices.

Finally, the advent of new technologies in all societal spheres has produced numerous opportunities, but also raised new challenges, including unbridled competition for the best talent, the digital divide, cyberaddiction, vulnerability to cybercrime, disappearing professions and ethical issues.

So, while some indicators are green, Québec faces, today and in the future, a considerable number of economic, social and environmental challenges.

## The Liberal Approach

Long considered the most credible political party on the economic front, the QLP needs to revive the approach that has made it the province's main choice when it comes to creating wealth, ensuring economic stability and guaranteeing universal freedom to live one's life as they choose.

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12 Hydro-Québec, Strategic Plan 2022-2026, 2022, p. 9

## The Liberal approach to prosperity rests on three pillars:

- individual well-being and entrepreneurial freedom;
- fair distribution of wealth;
- and sustainable development.

What's more, a Liberal government will:

- offer a clear vision;
- encourage innovation and technological progress;
- promote autonomous regional development according to the regions' specific characteristics;
- and promote responsible public finance management.

## Three Pillars

### I- Individual Well-Being and Entrepreneurial Freedom

Individual well-being is at the heart of the Liberal approach. In particular, we must ensure that every individual has access to education and training systems through which they can achieve professional fulfillment and make a greater contribution to economic growth. Highly qualified individuals can more easily adopt new technologies and participate in sectors with high added value. They are also better able to innovate and undertake new projects, and in so doing, raise their standard of living.

A nation's prosperity depends on its productivity, competitiveness and capacity to innovate. While the State has a role to play in stimulating these elements of economic vitality, the initiative must come from the private sector — from entrepreneurs. That is why the Québec Liberal Party believes in the freedom of Quebecers to undertake and innovate, with the support of public authorities where necessary, within the framework of a clear strategy.

### II- Fair Distribution of Wealth

The wealth created by individuals and technological progress must be distributed fairly. This means, above all, reducing social and economic inequalities, ensuring fair access to educational,

professional and economic opportunities, providing a social protection system, and promoting social mobility so that individuals, especially young Quebecers, can progress socially and economically.

In Québec, inequality of disposable income rose during the 1990s. Since 2000, it has been on a downward trend, according to data compiled by the *Observatoire québécois des inégalités*. On this basis, we can say that Québec is a more equal society than many other regions of Canada<sup>13</sup>.

However, we can do better. When specialists analyze inequalities in terms of wealth, they note a trend towards greater concentration since the end of the last century.

For Liberals, social justice is fundamental. Without it, confidence in the political and economic system erodes, and disillusionment sets in. These phenomena can pave the way for populist policies.

### **III- Sustainable Development**

Along with individual well-being and social justice, the transition to a Greenhouse Gas-free economy must form one of the three pillars of the Liberal approach to prosperity.

All government policies must comply with the highest standards of sustainable development and promote the ecological transition. In addition, these policies must satisfy the “Just Transition” principle, according to which the transition to a green economy does not unfairly penalize individuals, communities, and regions, by providing new job opportunities, training and, where appropriate, financial support.

## **A Clear Vision**

The Québec government’s economic development efforts cannot be reduced to a series of piecemeal “deals”. We need a plan: a medium- and long-term vision. We need to make choices based on this plan. This was Jean Lesage and René Lévesque’s approach with the “Maitre chez nous”, Robert Bourassa’s with the James Bay project, and Jean Charest’s with the Plan Nord.

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Sandy Torres. Évolution des inégalités économiques au Canada et au Québec : tendances et causes. Observatoire québécois des inégalités, 2021.

Above all, we must never lose sight of why, for a demographically modest nation like ours, economic development is so important. Our vitality as a distinct society is based on the French language and our culture, of course, but these can only progress if the Québec economy is solid, modern and progressive.

## Technological Progress

A key aspect of the Liberal approach is to guarantee room for technological progress. It is through the invention of new technologies or improving existing ones that we can be more productive, develop new products and services, as well as grow the economy. This can be achieved by supporting research and development, as well as measures to help people acquire or improve their skills, or even reorient themselves professionally.

In this respect, Québec has been suffering for many years from a deficit in private investment. In 2023, according to Statistics Canada projections, business investment in Québec will account for just 14.8% of private investment in Canada<sup>14</sup>.

In the crucial field of research and development, Québec, while doing better than the rest of Canada, still spends less (relative to its GDP) than the average of G7 and OECD countries<sup>15</sup>. In a world transformed by technology at breakneck speed, we need to catch up.

## Regional Development and the Occupation of Québec's Territory

Throughout its tour of Québec's regions, the Committee heard citizens call for greater autonomy for their regions, and greater respect for their specific characteristics. The Committee endorses this demand.

It's not a question of handing over all responsibilities to the regions and leaving them with the entire financial burden. The Québec government must continue to play an important role in promoting and planning economic development on a national scale. This means giving regions the means to guide their own development according to their own advantages.

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<sup>14</sup> Gouvernement du Québec, *Budget 2023-2024*, Plan budgétaire, p. G-23

<sup>15</sup> <https://statistique.quebec.ca/fr/document/depenses-de-recherche-et-developpement-r-d-tableau/depenses-intra-muros-de-r-d-dird-en-pourcentage-du-pib-quebec-ontario-pays-de-locde-union-europeenne-g7-et-certains-pays-hors-ocde>

The dynamic occupation of Québec's territory has long been a priority for the Québec Liberal Party. In 2012, Jean Charest's government passed the Act to ensure the occupancy and vitality of territories. In 2018, Philippe Couillard's government launched the *Stratégie gouvernementale pour assurer l'occupation et la vitalité des territoires 2018-2022*.

Unfortunately, this momentum in favour of occupying Québec's territories has been lost in recent years. In this respect, certain data are worrying. For example, the proportion of municipalities with fewer than 1,000 inhabitants that have no retail buildings rose from 11.6% to 20.5% between 2006 and 2021<sup>16</sup>. The government's land-use strategy must be revitalized; the quality of life of tens of thousands of Quebecers depends on it.

## Responsible Management of Public Finances

The prosperity of a capitalist economy depends, among other things, on investor confidence. If business managers and entrepreneurs do not have confidence in the stability and sustainability of an economy, they will not take the risk of investing in it.

Investor confidence is also established through the responsible management of our public finances. Without the rigorous management of public funds by the Charest and Couillard governments, the current government would have had a much harder time finding the resources needed to face the COVID-19 pandemic.

For a nation in which government plays a fundamental role in key areas such as education, health, justice and the redistribution of wealth, the state's ability to act must absolutely be preserved, notably by avoiding excessive indebtedness. The Generations Fund, an initiative of the QLP's Youth Commission, set up by the Charest government, plays an essential role in this respect. Governments should avoid reducing payments to the Fund for short-term objectives.

## Proposals

In light of the economic, ecological and social challenges facing Québec, and the Liberal approach to prosperity, the Committee suggests a number of avenues for reflection in order to increase the people's collective wealth and facilitate the ecological transition. These contain elements by which the Liberals can once again become the party Quebecers trust when it comes to creating wealth sustainably, ensuring economic stability and enabling individuals to flourish socially and professionally.

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<sup>16</sup> [https://statistique.quebec.ca/docs-ken/vitrine/occupation-vitalite-territoire/documents/services\\_proximite\\_01.pdf](https://statistique.quebec.ca/docs-ken/vitrine/occupation-vitalite-territoire/documents/services_proximite_01.pdf)

## THE COST OF LIVING AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Since the end of the COVID-19 pandemic and the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the cost of living has been rising around the globe. Québec is no exception, with the highest inflation rate in Canada.

So far, the Québec government has contented itself with short-term measures such as sending out cheques to taxpayers. The Committee believes that a more systematic approach is needed to reduce the impact of inflation on households and improve access to housing. Indeed, according to economists, this impact is likely to be long-lasting. The inflationary spiral may stop, but the prices of food, goods and housing will not magically fall.

### **18. That is why the Committee calls on the Québec Liberal Party to consider adopting a law on inflation protection and housing affordability, modelled on the Act to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion, passed by the National Assembly in 2002.**

Since everything points to the fact that inflation and the housing shortage will be impacting us for many years, adopting such a law would ensure that the Québec government makes them medium- and long-term priorities. The law could provide for a national action plan to combat the rising cost of living. The *Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion's* (CÉPE) mandate could be broadened to include producing a detailed annual report on the impact of rising prices on Quebecers, particularly on the most vulnerable.

The Inflation Protection Act would expire after a set period, for example five years.

## Introduce a “Minimum Activity Income” (MAI)

### **19. The Committee believes that the Liberals could promote the idea of a “minimum activity income” (MAI), which the Québec government would pay to anyone whose income falls below a predetermined threshold.**

The MAI would take the form of a negative tax whereby a person with an income below the predetermined threshold would receive a sum of money to ensure a minimum standard of living. The MAI would be conditional on the pursuit of a productive activity. One would need to work, undergo training, or engage in an approved civic activity to be eligible. Approved activities would include volunteering with community organizations, participating in local projects, vocational or university education, mentoring and teaching, helping the vulnerable and social entrepreneurship.

To make the MAI a reality, the Committee suggests consolidating several provincial and federal tax credits and allowances, as well as reallocating the oversight of Employment Insurance. It also recommends phasing in the MAI gradually, to minimize the short-term economic disruption it could cause.

There are several reasons why the Committee believes the Liberals should adopt the MAI. First, it helps to combat the so-called poverty trap, i.e., the fact that it sometimes makes more fiscal sense to continue receiving certain financial aid than to be active, or even to enter the job market, despite the existence of work bonuses.

Second, by ensuring fair access to a decent income, the MAI enhances social justice. In particular, it promotes everyone's right to dignity and economic security, without which it is impossible to lead a dignified life and realize one's personal and professional ambitions.

Third, by linking eligibility for the MAI to a professional, educational or social activity, it not only promotes work, but also civic engagement. In particular, it has the potential to strengthen the bonds within the community and foster a shared commitment to civic duties.

Fourth, the MAI can also help simplify the range of existing financial aid schemes, and in so doing provide a much simpler and more effective approach to supporting the most disadvantaged.

## **THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE FIGHT AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE**

### **A Stronger Commitment to Reducing Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emissions**

Unless there is a significant change in trend, all indications are that Québec will not meet its 2030 target for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Achieving carbon neutrality by 2050 seems highly unlikely at the rate things are going<sup>17</sup>.

**20. In our opinion, the study of additional GHG reduction measures, particularly in the areas of transportation and industry, should be a priority for the Québec Liberal Party.**

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<sup>17</sup> Whitmore, J. et P.-O. Pineau. 2023. *État de l'énergie au Québec 2023*. Chaire de gestion du secteur de l'énergie, HEC Montréal, préparé pour le gouvernement du Québec, 2023, p. 58.

Quebecers expect no less from a political party that aspires to govern Québec.

As the *Institut de l'énergie Trottier* points out, “meeting the climate challenge requires us to face reality and stop indulging in our past successes, and instead building on them to create the future we want. It’s high time to send a clear message that this future will be carbon neutral, to put an end to the widespread inertia that is blocking advancement in the reduction of GHG emissions<sup>18</sup>.”

The future of climate change undoubtedly goes hand in hand with the future of energy. In wanting to preserve the environment and reducing GHGs, Québec could use consumers themselves to meet its increasing demand for energy through microgrids, such as the one inaugurated at Lac-Mégantic in 2021. Quebecers could generate the electricity they need using solar panels on their home or business roofs. The microgrids would be connected to Hydro-Québec’s main grid, so that the two could feed into each other depending on need and the season. However, the high cost of solar panels remains an obstacle to the large-scale deployment of such networks. The Liberal MNA for Jacques-Cartier, Gregory Kelley, has proposed that the Québec government use capital from the Green Fund to subsidize the installation of solar panels.

**21. Our Committee believes that the QLP should explore all innovative ideas for smarter electricity production and consumption, such as the development of distributed energy resources (DERs) already provided for in Hydro-Québec’s Strategic Plan 2022-2026<sup>19</sup>.**

## The Right to a Healthy Environment

Section 46.1 of the Québec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms (the “Québec Charter”) currently guarantees the right of Quebecers, “to live in a healthy environment that respects biodiversity, to the extent and according to the standards provided by law”. This right is therefore part of the “Economic and Social Rights” section of the Charter. As the *Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse* points out: “Although they are included in the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms, economic and social rights do not have the same status as the political and judicial fundamental rights (sections 1 to 38) that take explicit precedence over all other Québec laws.<sup>20</sup>”

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18 Institut de l'énergie Trottier, [Plan pour la carboneutralité](#), Résumé, p. 6.

19 Hydro-Québec, Strategic Plan, [2022-2026](#), p. 27.

20 <https://www.cdpcj.qc.ca/en/your-rights/what-is-economic-and-social-rights>



At a time when climate change represents an existential challenge for humanity, the right to a healthy environment has acquired particular importance. That being the case, this right should be included among the fundamental rights that the Charter protects.

**22. We recommend that the Québec Liberal Party pursue its efforts to include the right to a healthy environment in sections 1 to 38 of the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms.**

## The Premier's Responsibility

Given the urgency of climate change, and because global warming has consequences for both economic growth and wealth distribution, the fight against climate change must not be the sole responsibility of the Minister of the Environment, but rather of the entire government. That is why we believe this issue should be placed under the leadership of the Premier.

**23. The Committee believes that the measures proposed by the QLP in its 2022 platform remain fully relevant, notably:**

- The implementation of a Strategy for the Protection of Natural Environments and Biodiversity;
- The Premier of Québec will be directly responsible for achieving the province's GHG emission reduction targets;
- As part of the *Sommet sur l'avenir du Québec*, a COP-Québec should be held to take stock of the measures taken to combat climate change and develop new solutions.

## Sustainable Use of Our Natural Resources

Although Québec's economy is increasingly service oriented, like other western societies, natural resources — including minerals, forestry, and energy — continue to play a significant economic role.

As Desjardins Group Senior Economist Joëlle Noreau points out, “Québec has a lot of natural resources, not only in terms of volume, but also the economic activity they generate, and they carry considerable weight in investments and the export of goods internationally<sup>21</sup>.”

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Joëlle Noreau, Natural Resources: Still One of Québec's Economic Assets, Mouvement Desjardins, September 1 2021, p. 5

There can be no question of turning our backs on resource development. However, it is understood that this will have to be done with respect for environmental rules, the communities concerned, and our duties in the fight against climate change.

Québec has rigorous environmental rules and processes. It is on this basis, and the pursuit of social acceptability, that projects for the exploitation of natural resources should be evaluated. However, social acceptability should not be interpreted as the absence of all opposition, an impossible goal in a democratic society like ours.

**24. The Québec Liberal Party should commit to authorizing a natural resource development project if it is part of a government strategy, or if it contributes to achieving Québec’s environmental targets in the fight against climate change and the energy transition. A project such as this should also respect current environmental regulations and consultation processes.**

## **AN ECONOMIC VISION**

### **A Summit on Québec’s Economic, Social and Environmental Future**

Since the 1970s, Québec has faced major challenges through concerted action by the government, as well as business, union and community sectors. This concerted action was often agreed upon during summit meetings of all these stakeholders.

The existential challenges facing Québec in the coming years will require a broad social approval and the mobilization of all stakeholders. Such consensus can only be achieved at a summit to which elected officials from various levels of government, civil society representatives, private enterprise and experts in the fields concerned would be invited.

**25. A Québec Liberal Party government should commit to holding a Summit on Québec’s economic, social and environmental future.**

## A National Industrial Strategy

A number of speakers and experts consulted by the Committee stressed that a sprinkling of subsidies is not the most effective way for Québec to become more productive and competitive in the Canadian and international markets. Instead, more and more countries are turning to developing a genuine industrial strategy. In Canada, the Industrial Strategy Council, chaired by Monique F. Leroux, has proposed such a strategy for the country:

*Canada's peer countries are making bold strategic choices and investments to build their industries for the future. They are investing heavily in stimulus measures and deploying sector-specific support to drive productivity. Countries such as Italy and Germany have implemented aggressive fiscal responses. Other countries including the US, UK, China, France, Israel, India, as well as the EU are significantly increasing support for innovation in the face of an accelerated move to a digital, data-driven and decarbonized global economy, particularly as a result of the pandemic.<sup>22</sup>*

This approach, which proposes choosing a few cutting-edge sectors where Canada already enjoys competitive advantages and investing significantly in them, could be advantageously implemented by the Québec government.

**26. The Québec Liberal Party should propose the implementation of a genuine national industrial strategy, drawing on the strengths of the Québec economy. The ecological transition, our energy future and artificial intelligence should be at the heart of this strategy. As part of such a strategy, the government should invest significantly, but responsibly, in the chosen sectors.**

## An Economy Open to the World

Because of its unique position on the North American continent, Québec must put all its efforts into a renewed economic policy and culture. Compared to the 1950s, when Québec and Ontario were almost equal in terms of population, Ontario now has almost twice the population of Québec. Because of its small relative size, Québec has been a supporter of free trade over the decades, across all political parties. Indeed, free trade offers our companies access to much larger markets. In Québec, we need more companies like Bombardier, Couche-Tard, CGI and Cascades, creating for us a strong presence in the United States and Europe.

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Industry Strategy Council, *An Ambitious Growth Plan for Building a Digital, Sustainable and Innovative Economy*, 2020

**27. Taking inspiration from the role Premier Jean Charest played in the negotiation of the Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, a Liberal government should promote new free trade agreements with Asian and African countries.**

Québec should actively participate in the negotiation of these treaties, to ensure that they are concluded advantageously towards its economy.

## **REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

### **A New Way of Governing Québec**

Liberalism is based on the state's trust in individuals to make the best decisions for themselves. This trust must also apply to regional and local authorities, who are in a better position to choose the best development paths for their communities, according to Premier Robert Bourassa's cherished principle of subsidiarity. Consequently, the QLP must go beyond intentions and show determination in granting regions the autonomy and resources they need to succeed.

It's not a question of handing over all responsibilities regionally. Rather, it's a question of providing them with the means to achieve optimal development on their own, taking into account their specific characteristics. In other words, development must be made by and for Québec's regions.

### **Recognizing Regional Specificities**

The regions' future development cannot be adequately achieved without recognizing their own specific characteristics. This is necessary because, as we know, the State multiplies the number of regulations and standards with which they must comply, without any serious effort being made to take their specific characteristics into account. This situation hinders the regions' economic, social and cultural development, and therefore that of Québec as a whole.

All too often, regions located far from major centres lack the demographic clout to attract the attention of the Québec state. It's in this context that each region's territorial specificities are either ignored or set aside by an often distant bureaucracy. If they were given fair and equitable attention, and the appropriate financial resources, the regions could play their rightful role as the lungs of Québec's economic development.

## A New Regional Body

To present a revitalized perspective on Québec's economic growth and the development of its regions, the Québec Liberal Party must now establish an authentic system for regional consultation and decision-making. The QLP has long been sensitive to the merits of regional cooperation. It was a Liberal government that created the Regional Conferences of elected officers in 2003. The conferences were abolished in 2015 as part of the drive to restore public finances.

During our tour of the regions, a number of members lamented the demise of these conferences but agreed that the formula had its weaknesses. Indeed, the conferences were the subject of much criticism, not least because of their costs. Nevertheless, their abolition hurt. Indeed, whatever one may say, this body played an essential role in establishing authentic regional policies, while the regions had free rein to assert their vision of development.

The Committee on the Revival of the QLP invites the Party to draw inspiration from the exhaustive work carried out by the Committee on the Charter of Regions set up by our former leader, Dominique Anglade. After extensive consultations, this Committee drew up a detailed draft Charter of Regions that recommended, “a new way of governing Québec”. The proposed Charter would have taken the form of a law taking precedence over other laws passed by the National Assembly. The regional bodies established by the Charter could not have been modified or abolished without their agreement.

**28. With this in mind, we propose the creation of a new regional decision-making body to coordinate, catalyze and guide the development of Québec's different regions. Bringing together elected officials, economic players and representatives of civil society from each region, the Regional Coordination Centers (RCC) would be autonomous bodies. In particular, they would be responsible for drawing up a regional economic and social development plan.**

Each RCC would coordinate the development of one of the province's 17 administrative regions, with three exceptions specified by the Committee on the Charter of Regions. Thus, the Island of Montréal would have 5 RCCs and Montérégie 3. Gaspésie and Îles-de-la-Madeleine would each have their own centre.

Québec would entrust the RCCs with the management of regional economic diversification funds, which would also be enhanced.

### **29. RCCs would also be responsible for assessing their region's immigration needs.**

To foster a more prosperous regional economy, we must move away from working in isolated silos and disconnected environments. The solutions have been enumerated many times, and we know what they are. Our political Party must take note and implement them.

## **Workforce: A Need for Support**

Given the severe shortage of workers that is hampering growth in many regions of Québec, any regional economic development strategy must include a workforce plan. To this end, it is essential to improve our ability to attract newcomers to the regions, and to recognize the importance of the organizations responsible for welcoming them, as well as the companies that employ them. Companies on the ground are already investing time, effort, and capital in recruiting this new workforce.

However, small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) do not have the resources of large corporations when it comes to attracting and retaining foreign workers. In particular, SMEs need to be accompanied through the bureaucratic maze involved in welcoming immigrant workers.

### **30. That is why we suggest that regional labour hubs be set up in regions that deem it appropriate.**

Interested SMEs could use the services of these regional hubs, for a modest fee. These hubs would be placed under the authority of the Regional Consultation Centers.

## **Mobility as a Key to Regional Development**

Though it is often overlooked in regional economic development strategies, improving intra-and interregional mobility is essential. It would be appropriate for the Québec Liberal Party to fully review the current approach to this issue.

The Québec government should be prepared to release substantial sums of money to enable existing carriers, or new players, to offer services that meet the expectations and needs of regions currently poorly served by transportation networks.

There is a clear inequity between the major cities of Montréal and Québec City and the other regions of the province when it comes to public transport. Billions are being invested in public

funds for the REM, the Montréal metro and Québec City's tramway, not to mention a possible third link between Québec City and the south shore. Meanwhile, other regions suffer from severely deficient public transit systems.

As for air transport, whatever formula is chosen (in 2020, MNA Pierre Arcand proposed an innovative avenue with Bill 691)<sup>23</sup>, the Québec government will probably have no choice but to invest more to guarantee the province's regions regular and reliable connections.

Finally, maintaining and modernizing road infrastructure remains essential for regions far from major urban centres. After a rapid increase between 2006 and 2014, the percentage of roads under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Transport deemed to be in good condition is declining. And these roads, which are probably the most well maintained in the province, represent barely 10% of Québec's road network<sup>24</sup>.

**31. The Québec Liberal Party should commit to investing the necessary sums to provide the province's outlying regions with modern, efficient intra-and interregional transportation systems and road networks.**

## Ensure the Presence of Each Ministry in Each Region

If the Québec government is to be able to tailor its programs and interventions to the specific characteristics of each region, it is essential that it be well established in every one of them, rather than having the bulk of its decision-making powers concentrated in Québec City. Various avenues deserve to be explored.

**32. Our committee suggests that the QLP look into possible formulas for the representation of the high-ranking public administration in the regions.**

## A New Regional Program

**33. We recommend the implementation of a new Québec program for regional development, managed by the Regional Consultation Centers.**

The funds from this new program would give regions the freedom they need to establish a development strategy that takes their realities into account.

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<sup>23</sup> The bill amending The Act Respecting the Ministère des Transports in order to ensure the maintenance of air transport services in certain regions of Quebec.

<sup>24</sup> [https://statistique.quebec.ca/docs-ken/vitrine/occupation-vitalite-territoire/documents/mobilite\\_03.pdf](https://statistique.quebec.ca/docs-ken/vitrine/occupation-vitalite-territoire/documents/mobilite_03.pdf)

## An Appealing Tax System

Taxation plays an important role in implementing a regionalization strategy. The QLP should reflect on the best tax incentives to deploy in order to enable regions to meet their challenges and develop fully.

- 34. The Committee recommends reviewing regional workers and business taxation, to help attract and retain employees, and to encourage entrepreneurship, business succession and family transfers.**

In addition, new tax credits, similar to the *Crédit d'impôt favorisant l'emploi* in Gaspésie and certain maritime regions of Québec, could be granted to companies considering investing in Québec regions outside the major centres.

## Updating the Plan Nord

- 35. The Committee proposes that the Plan Nord be updated so that Northern Québec becomes a true lever for wealth creation and facilitates the economy's ecological transition, in particular the achievement of Québec's carbon neutrality objectives.**

Indeed, the North is abundant with natural resources — lithium, graphite, nickel, biomass, for example — which are essential for Québec's and the global economy's ecological transition, whether for the manufacture of electric batteries, solar panels, or the production of renewable energy.

As originally conceived, the Plan Nord was intended to bring significant social and economic benefits to Indigenous communities. As the Minister of Indigenous Affairs, Geoffrey Kelley, a member of our committee, stated at the time, “the Plan Nord will be implemented in a spirit of mutual respect, and future generations will be able to draw inspiration from this innovative partnership model, based on dialogue and respect. Its development will integrate the Indigenous vision as it evolves over the course of its implementation.” The Québec government's actions in the North must reflect this state of mind.

The Committee also suggests that the next Plan Nord (2024-2026) includes a strategy for Québec's Arctic. Given that part of Québec's territory borders the Canadian Arctic, and that climate change is opening up new shipping lanes that are attracting the interest of many countries, Northern Québec now plays a considerable geopolitical role.



# A GOVERNMENT AT THE SERVICE OF QUEBECERS

## More Efficient, Humane Services

During the Committee's tour, we heard many citizens complain about the Québec government's inability to deliver quality services in a timely and humane manner. This is particularly striking in the healthcare sector but is also true in other areas of public service. This situation is unacceptable. Quebecers pay high taxes to have access to services. If these services are delivered with unreasonable delays and disrespectfully to the individuals, they are not getting their money's worth.

Quebecers made a social choice during the Quiet Revolution: higher taxes for more service, and they are sticking to it. It's a societal choice over which governments of several political parties have presided; there is no intention for us to challenge or reconsider it.

That said, a change of culture is needed within government to ensure that Quebecers receive the quality services to which they are entitled. It's all about putting the citizen at the heart of government operations.

To achieve this, we need to provide government employees with the working conditions, environment, and tools they need, as demanded by their unions. This will undoubtedly require additional human and financial resources, within the government's fiscal capacity. In the past, public sector unions have suggested changes aimed at making the State more efficient. So, in this respect, government and unions share the same objective.

**36. The Committee proposes that the Québec Liberal Party, in collaboration with labour organizations, initiate a process of reflection on how to bring about a change of culture within public services. It is not a question of cutting budgets or services; on the contrary, it is, more than ever before, about placing the Québec State at the service of the people.**

## A Single Tax Return

The State must obviously provide the best possible public services to the population, but it must also avoid making life difficult for them through excessive taxes and unnecessarily fussy regulations. Our Committee particularly believes in the urgency to alleviate the burden imposed on taxpayers and businesses by abolishing the obligation to file two tax returns every year.

**37. The Liberal Party should commit to a swift negotiation with the Government of Canada to reach an agreement whereby Quebecers would only have to file one tax return.**

The objective here is not to give more power to one level of government or another, but to simplify life for citizens and businesses. Sharing this objective, Québec and Ottawa should be able to reach agreement on this issue. Logically, as is the case with the GST/HST, administering income tax should be entrusted to Revenu Québec.

## The Party of SMEs

Although the media pay a great deal of attention to large corporations in their coverage of economic news, 86.5% of jobs in Québec are created by SMEs, 64.8% of them in small businesses (fewer than 100 employees)<sup>25</sup>. This means that any policy aimed at the economic development of Québec must pay particular attention to small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

As part of its tour of Québec's regions, our Committee heard entrepreneurs emphasize that the tax and administrative burden imposed on them by the Québec government are, along with the labour shortage, the main obstacle to their growth. This difficult situation is undoubtedly related to the significant rise in the number of business bankruptcies in Québec between 2022 and 2023 (+29.1%); six out of 10 Canadian business bankruptcies are in fact Québec companies<sup>26</sup>.

**38. In keeping with its history and the recommendations of the Youth Commission, the Québec Liberal Party should make regulatory relief a priority and consider a series of measures to reduce the tax, regulatory and bureaucratic burden on SMEs.**

## PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

### Intergenerational Equity

The challenges facing Québec are particularly concerning to young people, who will have to live with the consequences of the choices we make today.

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<sup>25</sup> <https://ised-isde.canada.ca/site/sme-research-statistics/en/key-small-business-statistics/key-small-business-statistics-2021>

<sup>26</sup> <https://ised-isde.canada.ca/site/office-superintendent-bankruptcy/en/statistics-and-research/insolvency-statistics-july-2023>

Faced with an increasingly uncertain future — socially, economically and environmentally — today’s youth are looking for a political party capable of proposing major societal projects that respond to these uncertainties. They want a party that understands their fears and offers them a clear vision of a Québec of the future that matches their aspirations. The QLP can and must embody this vision. We must therefore continue to be guided by the principle of intergenerational equity.

**39. This means upholding the following rights of Québec’s youth:**

- The right to a healthy, high-quality environment;
- The right to sound public finances;
- The right to a fair and modern education as the foundation of our society;
- The right to a green, prosperous and inclusive Québec.

## A Constant Eye on the Digital Revolution

The digital revolution is gathering pace, particularly with the dazzling progress of artificial intelligence. This revolution raises many fears, particularly in terms of employment. But for companies and individuals who can and will take advantage of it, it offers tremendous opportunities.

Unfortunately, the evolution of cutting-edge technologies is happening so fast that it’s difficult for governments to keep up. Thanks in part to the creation of Mila, the Québec AI Institute, our province is fortunate to be able to count on world-class expertise in this field.

**40. In order to enable the Québec government to rapidly adapt its policies regarding technological revolution development, a Permanent Advisory Committee on Artificial Intelligence and New Technologies should be formed to advise the State on these matters.**

# Reforming the Labour Market

The current labour shortage is preventing the Québec economy from operating at full capacity, thus depriving the State of resources that would help provide Quebecers with the services to which they are entitled.

## 41. The Liberal Party should propose an in-depth reform of the labour market to tackle the labour shortage. Such a reform should include the following measures:

- Getting seniors more involved, notably by making the Tax Credit for Career Extension refundable;
- Tax exemption for overtime hours;
- Multiply initiatives to recognize training received abroad by new Quebecers, and to facilitate their integration into the workplace;
- Invest in lifelong learning to prepare the next generation for the careers of the future.



# Conclusion

This report is primarily based on the contributions of our members. Dozens of them dedicated their evenings and weekends to engage in discussions with us about the future of the Québec Liberal Party. They sent us reference documents, shared their feedback, and participated in interviews, either in person, via phone or through video conference.

While touring different regions of Québec, the Renewal Committee met with active members who were aware of the Party's challenges but who remained confident and determined to participate in its reconstruction. The general sentiment expressed is that there are more liberals in Québec than the election results and polls suggest. Observers are mistaken: the QLP is thriving with a strong base in every region of the province.

Through conversations with members, we are even more convinced that the Québec Liberal Party is the only political party capable of providing a credible alternative to the CAQ government.

Throughout our consultations, we had numerous discussions about how crucial it is to reconnect with the Québec electorate. There is a prerequisite to this, however, and that is for the QLP to first reconnect with its own members and supporters. To achieve this, we must assert ourselves as Quebecers, as Canadians, and as Liberals. We cannot let our opponents define us and must proudly uphold our convictions, values, and ideas.

Furthermore, we must follow the advice of the participants and be more present. Many members from different regions have complained about the QLP's absence from events and debates specific to their area. When liberal representatives are not present, it provides an opportunity for other political parties to monopolize and dominate the conversation. The work of our committee is thus only the first step in the necessary reconstruction of our party.

An assertive, united and prosperous Québec: this is the liberal vision for the 21st century. Québec will be able to meet the significant challenges it faces if it asserts itself as a distinct nation, if it is united rather than divided, and if it generates wealth in all regions to achieve greater social justice, sustainable development, and intergenerational equity. A Québec that is dynamic, ambitious, and open towards the world. The Committee strongly believes that this is the social project that the Québec Liberal Party must present to all Quebecers.

# Proposals

## An Assertive Québec

1. According to the Committee, the QLP should consider drafting a Québec constitution, i.e., a document that brings together the constitutional rules, standards and conventions governing Québec, and that explicitly states Québec's values and identity. We note that the Youth Commission adopted a resolution to this effect during its 2019 Congress.
2. The QLP should seriously consider introducing a preferential voting system. Quebecers should be given the opportunity to vote on this issue.
3. A Liberal government should work with Ottawa to clarify the Canada–Québec Accord relating to Immigration and Temporary Admission of Aliens (the McDougall-Gagnon-Tremblay Accord) in order to extend the jurisdiction of the Québec government on the entry of all temporary foreign workers, including those coming through the International Mobility Program.
4. Until the Québec Constitution is enacted, the English-speaking community's existing rights to healthcare and social services in English, and their right to manage their educational and health institutions should be clearly recognized by the relevant laws.
5. The Committee believes that Québec should work with its provincial and federal partners to reform the Canadian Senate.
6. The committee believes that Québec should renew its policy on the Canadian Francophonie and adopt measures that will enable it to play a genuine leadership role in the global Francophonie.
7. Given the significant challenges facing Canada's Francophones, Québec should initiate discussions with Francophone associations in the rest of the country on the opportunity of holding "États généraux"<sup>27</sup> of the Canadian Francophonie.
8. Along with the Canadian government and other provincial governments, the Québec government should be fully committed to revitalizing the OIF.

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<sup>27</sup> « États Généraux » refers to multi-stakeholder forums that foster deliberation and consensus-building among diverse societal sectors including government, civil society, and business.

## A United Québec

9. The Committee believes that the QLP must commit to recognizing the shortcomings of the current government systems and work in partnership with First Nations and Inuit to develop their capacity for autonomy and assert their determination to shape the future of the next generations.
10. The Committee suggests that the QLP should explore the possibility of enacting legislation on interculturalism. This legislation would outline the principles and criteria for incorporating newcomers, embracing cultural diversity, and fostering harmonious coexistence.
11. The Committee suggests that the QLP reflect on strong measures that could be taken to encourage companies, as part of their social responsibility practices, to increase the presence of French in their workplaces, and to do more to integrate immigrant workers in French.
12. There is much to gain by showcasing our local expertise across a multitude of fields, and we already hold an esteemed reputation among numerous French-speaking players.
13. In the Committee's view, the QLP should develop a comprehensive reform of French language education.
14. We believe that those who have the daily responsibility of teaching our children must have their role as cultural mediators and socialization agents fully recognized and valued by the Québec government.
15. This commitment to the teaching profession must also translate into better funding for school infrastructure and increased support for schools in disadvantaged areas, which, it must be noted, must contend with distinct realities and problems.
16. In the Committee's view, the Québec Liberal Party should develop a renewed and expanded philosophy for Québec's schools. One that sees the teacher as a custodian, mediator, and transmitter of common socio-cultural references. This should be achieved within the framework of a collective social project capable of energizing Québec's educational sector and supporting teachers in their vocation.
17. In order to pacify the debate, the Liberal Party should propose amending Québec's Immigration Act, thereby establishing a committee of independent experts tasked with measuring Québec's ability for reception and integration prior to the government's multi-year immigration plan.

# A Prosperous Québec

## THE COST OF LIVING AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

18. The Committee calls on the Québec Liberal Party to consider adopting a law on inflation protection and housing affordability, modelled on the Act to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion, passed by the National Assembly in 2002.
19. The Committee believes that the Liberals could promote the idea of a “minimum activity income” (MAI), which the Québec government would pay to anyone whose income falls below a predetermined threshold.

## THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE FIGHT AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE

20. In our opinion, the study of additional GHG reduction measures, particularly in the areas of transportation and industry, should be a priority for the Québec Liberal Party.
21. Our Committee believes that the QLP should explore all innovative ideas for smarter electricity production and consumption, such as the development of distributed energy resources (DERs) already provided for in Hydro-Québec’s Strategic Plan 2022-2026.
22. We recommend that the Québec Liberal Party pursue its efforts to include the right to a healthy environment in sections 1 to 38 of the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms.
23. The Committee believes that the measures proposed by the QLP in its 2022 platform remain fully relevant, notably:
  - i. The implementation of a Strategy for the Protection of Natural Environments and Biodiversity;
  - ii. The Premier of Québec will be directly responsible for achieving the province’s GHG emission reduction targets;
  - iii. As part of the *Sommet sur l’avenir du Québec*, a COP-Québec should be held to take stock of the measures taken to combat climate change and develop new solutions.



24. The Québec Liberal Party should commit to authorizing a natural resource development project if it is part of a government strategy, or if it contributes to achieving Québec's environmental targets in the fight against climate change and the energy transition. A project such as this should also respect current environmental regulations and consultation processes.

## AN ECONOMIC VISION

25. A Québec Liberal Party government should commit to holding a Summit on Québec's economic, social and environmental future.
26. The Québec Liberal Party should propose the implementation of a genuine national industrial strategy, drawing on the strengths of the Québec economy. The ecological transition, our energy future and artificial intelligence should be at the heart of this strategy. As part of such a strategy, the government should invest significantly, but responsibly, in the chosen sectors.
27. Taking inspiration from the role Premier Jean Charest played in the negotiation of the Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, a Liberal government should promote new free trade agreements with Asian and African countries.

## REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

28. We propose the creation of a new regional decision-making body to coordinate, catalyze and guide the development of Québec's different regions. Bringing together elected officials, economic players and representatives of civil society from each region, the Regional Coordination Centers (RCC) would be autonomous bodies. In particular, they would be responsible for drawing up a regional economic and social development plan.
29. RCCs would also be responsible for assessing their region's immigration needs.
30. We suggest that regional labour hubs be set up in regions that deem it appropriate.
31. The Québec Liberal Party should commit to investing the necessary sums to provide the province's outlying regions with modern, efficient intra-and interregional transportation systems and road networks.
32. Our committee suggests that the QLP look into possible formulas for the representation of the high-ranking public administration in the regions.
33. We recommend the implementation of a new Québec program for regional development, managed by the Regional Consultation Centers.

34. The Committee recommends reviewing regional workers and business taxation, to help attract and retain employees, and to encourage entrepreneurship, business succession and family transfers.
35. The Committee proposes that the Plan Nord be updated so that Northern Québec becomes a true lever for wealth creation and facilitates the economy's ecological transition, in particular the achievement of Québec's carbon neutrality objectives.

## **A GOVERNMENT AT THE SERVICE OF QUEBECERS**

36. The Committee proposes that the Québec Liberal Party, in collaboration with labour organizations, initiate a process of reflection on how to bring about a change of culture within public services. It is not a question of cutting budgets or services; on the contrary, it is, more than ever before, about placing the Québec State at the service of the people.
37. The Liberal Party should commit to a swift negotiation with the Government of Canada to reach an agreement whereby Quebecers would only have to file one tax return.
38. In keeping with its history and the recommendations of the Youth Commission, the Québec Liberal Party should make regulatory relief a priority and consider a series of measures to reduce the tax, regulatory and bureaucratic burden on SMEs.

## **PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE**

39. The Liberal Party should commit to upholding the following rights of Québec's youth:
  - i. The right to a healthy, high-quality environment;
  - ii. The right to sound public finances;
  - iii. The right to a fair and modern education as the foundation of our society;
  - iv. The right to a green, prosperous and inclusive Québec.
40. In order to enable the Québec government to rapidly adapt its policies regarding technological revolution development, a Permanent Advisory Committee on Artificial Intelligence and New Technologies should be formed to advise the State on these matters.

41. The Liberal Party should propose an in-depth reform of the labour market to tackle the labour shortage. Such a reform should include the following measures:
  - i. Getting seniors more involved, notably by making the Tax Credit for Career Extension refundable;
  - ii. Tax exemption for overtime hours;
  - iii. Multiply initiatives to recognize training received abroad by new Quebecers, and to facilitate their integration into the workplace;
  - iv. Invest in lifelong learning to prepare the next generation for the careers of the future.