

## FW: Ontario-Quebec Summit - September 8-9, 2020

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**From:**

"henry, barbara" <barbara.henry@pco-bcp.gc.ca>

**To:**

"Ling, Margarete" <margarete.ling@pco-bcp.gc.ca>, "James, Andrew" <andrew.james@pco-bcp.gc.ca>, "Chenard, Andrée" <andree.chenard@pco-bcp.gc.ca>, "Robinson, Jodi" <jodi.robinson@pco-bcp.gc.ca>, "Van Kessel, Karl" <karl.vankessel@pco-bcp.gc.ca>, "Tekle, Rebeka" <rebeka.tekle@pco-bcp.gc.ca>, "Thompson, Rebecca" <rebecca.thompson@pco-bcp.gc.ca>, "Dewar, Julia" <julia.dewar@pco-bcp.gc.ca>, "Mullings, Keisha" <keisha.mullings@pco-bcp.gc.ca>, "Mills, Brent" <brent.mills@pco-bcp.gc.ca>, "Saifuddin, Saeema" <saeema.saifuddin@pco-bcp.gc.ca>

**Cc:**

"Bujold, Megan" <megan.bujold@pco-bcp.gc.ca>

**Date:**

Thu, 10 Sep 2020 08:36:25 -0400

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FYI. Barb

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**From:** Fox, Christiane <Christiane.Fox@pco-bcp.gc.ca>

**Smell:** September 10, 2020 8:11 AM

**To:** Shugart, Ian <Ian.Shugart@pco-bcp.gc.ca>; Tremblay, Christyne; <Christyne.Tremblay@pco-bcp.gc.ca>Jennings, Philip; <Philip.Jennings@pco-bcp.gc.ca>Pham, Thao; <Thao.Pham@pco-bcp.gc.ca>McCowan, Ian; <Ian.McCowan@pco-bcp.gc.ca>Mondou, Isabelle; <Isabelle.Mondou@pco-bcp.gc.ca>MacKillop, Ken; <Ken.MacKillop@pco-bcp.gc.ca>Sherman, Janine; <Janine.Sherman@pco-bcp.gc.ca>Shea, Matthew; <Matthew.Shea@pco-bcp.gc.ca>Beck, Stefanie; <Stefanie.Beck@pco-bcp.gc.ca>Setlakwe, Lisa; <Lisa.Setlakwe@pco-bcp.gc.ca>Halucha, Paul; <Paul.Halucha@pco-bcp.gc.ca>Beaudoin, Alain; <Alain.Beaudoin@pco-bcp.gc.ca>Henry, Barbara; <Barbara.Henry@pco-bcp.gc.ca>Morrison, David; <David.Morrison@pco-bcp.gc.ca>Rigby, Vincent; <Vincent.Rigby@pco-bcp.gc.ca>Perreault, Claudie; <Claudie.Perreault@pco-bcp.gc.ca>Khwaja, Saba; <Saba.Khwaja@pco-bcp.gc.ca>Brunelle-Côté, Antoine <Antoine.Brunelle-Cote@pco-bcp.gc.ca>

**Subject:** </Antoine.Brunelle-Cote@pco-bcp.gc.ca></Saba.Khwaja@pco-bcp.gc.ca></Claudie.Perreault@pco-bcp.gc.ca></Vincent.Rigby@pco-bcp.gc.ca></David.Morrison@pco-bcp.gc.ca></Barbara.Henry@pco-bcp.gc.ca></Alain.Beaudoin@pco-bcp.gc.ca></Paul.Halucha@pco-bcp.gc.ca></Lisa.Setlakwe@pco-bcp.gc.ca></Stefanie.Beck@pco-bcp.gc.ca></Matthew.Shea@pco-bcp.gc.ca></Janine.Sherman@pco-bcp.gc.ca></Ken.MacKillop@pco-bcp.gc.ca></Isabelle.Mondou@pco-bcp.gc.ca></Ian.McCowan@pco-bcp.gc.ca></Thao.Pham@pco-bcp.gc.ca></Philip.Jennings@pco-bcp.gc.ca></Christyne.Tremblay@pco-bcp.gc.ca></Ian.Shugart@pco-bcp.gc.ca>: Ontario-Quebec Summit - September 8-9, 2020

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On September 8-9, Ontario Premier Doug Ford and Quebec Premier François Legault convened their first-ever Ontario-Quebec Summit to advance shared priorities on economic recovery and health preparedness. The summit took place in Mississauga, Ontario.

During the summit, the Premiers and Ministers participated in a series of meetings during which they discussed key areas of cooperation, including lessons learned from the pandemic, accelerating economic recovery and growth by reducing barriers to international trade and promoting Ontario-made and Quebec-made products, and advocating on behalf of Ontarians and Quebecers with the federal government to provide fair, flexible and sustainable funding for important priorities, including health care, infrastructure and broadband.

The following ministers attended the summit:

- Ontario: Christine Elliott, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health, Rod Phillips, Minister of Finance, Vic Fedeli, Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade, Laurie Scott, Minister of Infrastructure, Caroline Mulroney, Minister of Transportation, and Peter Bethlenfalvy, President of the Treasury Board.
- Quebec: Éric Girard, Minister of Finance, Christian Dubé, Minister of Health, Pierre Fitzgibbon, Minister of Economy and Innovation, and Sonia LeBel, Chair of the Treasury Board and Minister Responsible for Infrastructure.

#### Joint statement

Ontario and Quebec released a [joint statement](#) at the end of the summit, in which they noted that they agreed to collaborate on accelerating economic recovery and job creation, working towards increasing health care funding sustainability and preparedness, and advancing other areas of mutual benefit for the people of Ontario and Quebec. They also agreed to continue their collaboration to share lessons learned from the pandemic and prepare their health care systems for a potential second wave of COVID-19.

Ontario and Quebec also noted that with the COVID-19 crisis amplifying existing pressures on the provinces' respective health care systems, they call on the federal government to remedy longstanding underinvestment in provincial health care by committing to a long-term funding partnership with the provinces and territories for health care through a significant increase of the Canada Health Transfer (CHT).

The Premiers and Ministers of the two governments agreed to work together to grow and strengthen the economy as it gradually and safely reopens. The provinces also agreed to press the federal government for fair, flexible, sustainable funding for other key priorities that support economic recovery and resilience, including infrastructure, transit, other sector-specific supports and broadband in order to accelerate access to high-speed Internet access for rural, remote, and Northern communities.

Quebec and Ontario also agreed to collaborate on combating U.S. protectionism, removing trade barriers, and promoting Ontario-made and Québec-made products to help protect and create more jobs for Ontarians and Quebecers. The news releases [indicate](#) that the governments will further work together to develop shared principles on the safe and responsible reopening of the Canada-U.S. border and ensure Ottawa has a clear plan before any restrictions are relaxed.

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Premiers Ford and Legault agreed to convene annual meetings to jointly work on shared priorities and areas of mutual agreement.

#### Media availability (September 9)

Premier Ford noted the Ontario-Quebec summit is historic because when the two provinces work together, nothing can stop them. Premier Ford added that together, they are a powerful economic and political unit, and he emphasized that solidifying this bond is more important than ever before, notably when it comes to fighting U.S. protectionism and having more leverage when negotiating with the federal government.

Premier Ford noted that Ontario and Quebec combined are the third largest trading partner to the U.S. and they need to defend businesses from U.S. tariffs and other trade barriers. Premier Ford noted that with the federal Speech from the Throne on the horizon, it is clear that the provinces need to push the federal government for fair, flexible and sustainable funding for health care. Ontario and Quebec have been on the front lines of COVID-19 and need to build stronger health care systems and stay prepared for any scenario this fall. Premier Ford noted they want a fair deal for all provinces and territories, and called on the federal government to step up with an increase to the Canada Health Transfer (CHT). Premier Ford said he looks forward to discussing a proposal at the upcoming Council of the Federation meeting. Premier Ford noted the premiers have agreed to convene an annual meeting to continue their work.

Premier François Legault noted that the two premiers discussed the health crisis, which remains the top priority. Premier Legault indicated that they also talked about economic recovery, and he pointed out that the prerequisite is to prevent the number of COVID-19 cases from rising. He also indicated that even before the pandemic, funding for health services was a very important issue in all provinces, and that when you add up the total cost of health care in all provinces, you are looking at about \$200 billion in spending, compared with the federal share of about \$42 billion (21 percent). Premier Legault believes that the federal government must contribute more to health care and that the provinces and territories need a recurring, unconditional contribution from the federal government. Premier Legault also indicated that the provinces and territories have substantial infrastructure needs, including public transit infrastructure in both provinces. He concluded by saying that the Prime Minister of Canada must make a greater effort to provide more flexibility for existing programs and to develop additional federal programs.

PM Legault repeated in English that provinces and territories need the federal government to do its part financing health care in a recurrent fashion and without conditions. He added that provinces and territories need a substantial increase of the CHT. He also said provinces and territories need more federal support for public transit. He concluded that Ontario and Quebec are closer than ever. Premier Legault noted they are fighting the same pandemic and they share the same urgent need to find a lasting solution to health care funding and restarting the economy.

#### Questions of interest

*Question: Mr. Legault, in view of the increase in COVID-19 cases in Quebec, isn't it time to clamp down as B.C. did yesterday?*

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**Premier Legault:** The Minister of Health and the Minister of Public Safety have already indicated that, in the yellow zones, they will clamp down regarding inspections and fines for people who do not comply with the current rules.

*Question: Earlier this morning, the Prime Minister of Canada said that the federal government would be there to help the provinces with health care, but he did not make a firm commitment on a specific percentage. Is that satisfactory?*

**Premier Legault:** First of all, the two provinces came to an agreement today. We will have the opportunity to discuss this with the other premiers. It is important to present a common front, as we did for the non-recurring COVID funding. We are asking for recurring funding, and we will have the opportunity in the coming weeks to make specific requests, and we may get the Prime Minister's response in the Throne Speech.

*Question: If the Prime Minister refuses to increase health transfers, what leverage do you have to force his hand, and what would be the impact on public finances in Quebec?*

**Premier Legault:** The practical problem is that for \$200 billion in spending, there is a 5 or 6 percent increase. You can't cover 80 percent of it with half the taxes. We need the federal government. I think the federal government will understand, but this is really a political decision, and the Prime Minister must recognize that health is a high priority for Canadians, and we can't continue to split the bill 80-20.

*Question: Why isn't the province taking ownership of reporting COVID-19 cases in schools like it did for long-term care facilities rather than putting this responsibility on school boards?*

**Premier Ford:** We will be reporting moving forward. This is the second day back to school. We will be reporting it and it is so important we report every single case, as we did for long-term care facilities.

*Question: British Columbia is rolling back its reopening. Is this a sign of things to come for the country and are rollbacks considered in either province?*

**Premier Ford:** I always get advice from health experts. Numbers dropped a little bit but until numbers drop below 100 again, I don't feel quite comfortable. We will take advice from Dr. Williams (Chief Medical Officer) and the public health table will decide when/if we are rolling things back.

**Premier Legault:** Regarding new cases in Quebec, most of them are not coming from bars. We have to look at real solutions. Main problem is coming from private gatherings and that's where we have to ask the population to respect public health measures.

*Question: The second wave seems to be under way in Quebec. Is this the right time to be holding a summit with Ontario?*

**Premier Legault:** We had extensive discussions about health care funding. Not all ministers were present, and we followed public health guidelines.

*Question: Concerning federal transfers, are you looking for a new fiscal arrangement with the federal government to transfer part of the tax field so that the provinces can fully and completely fund their health care spending themselves?*

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**Premier Legault:** The problem is that tax points are growing 3 percent a year while health care spending is increasing by 5 or 6 percent.

*Question: Why is Quebec not adopting the COVID alert app?*

**Premier Legault:** Right now, there is consensus in Quebec; the three opposition parties are against the app. We will look in the next few months at what we can do. There is a consensus at the National Assembly because of the concerns regarding personal data.

*Question: You are joining forces to call for more federal funding. If you do get this money, how are you going to use it to help with a potential second wave?*

**Premier Legault:** It is not directly related to a second wave or COVID-19. It is a structural problem that is increasing every year, including additional expenses related to COVID. We need help from the federal government if we want to share the burden of increasing health care expenses.