



February 20, 2023

MP Sophie Chatel, Co-Chair
MP Marie-France Lalonde, Co-Chair
NCR Caucus
Via Email

Dear MP Chatel & MP Lalonde,

Federal Budget 2023

Thank you for the opportunity to offer remarks on the upcoming budget, a key tool to ensure Canada is competitive and able to provide the services Canadians require today and in the future.

The Ottawa Board of Trade is the voice of business and a key advocate for economic development in our Nation's Capital. Our mission is to cultivate a thriving world class business community. One that drives affordable, inclusive, and sustainable city building and community prosperity. We work closely with our colleagues at the Ontario and Canadian Chambers of Commerce as well as key economic partners at all levels of decision making. We wish to thank our local MPs for your collaboration and dedication to our city and our country as international leaders. You have consistently demonstrated your understanding that business success and economic growth drive quality of life for all.

We have a unique opportunity to leverage the lessons we have learned in the last three years, including:

- We are all connected. Economic growth, public and mental health are intertwined.
- We get things done by prioritizing progress over perfection and be willing to course correct.
- We optimize our collective resources for the highest impact through radical collaboration.

Together, we must focus on a growth agenda. The key is to empower and inspire the private sector to lead the way. Canada must focus on creating the right environment for business predictability, competitiveness, and growth. To that end, we strongly support the [recommendations submitted by the Canadian Chamber of Commerce](#) focused on the future of business success, including:

1. Building Trade Enhancing Infrastructure
2. Easing the Burden of Doing Business
3. Transitioning to Net
4. Attracting and Retaining Talent
5. Enabling an Innovative Economy

In addition, we wish to see a federal strategy in support of Canadian downtowns and metropolitan areas as proposed by the [Canadian Global Cities Council](#) directly to the Prime Minister's Office in late 2022. The pandemic has disproportionately impacted Canadian downtowns which are highly strategic economic areas. In 2018, Canada's metropolitan areas accounted for more than 60% of national GDP and more than 82% of the population. We recommend a country wide strategy to support downtown areas of Canadian cities to stop the devitalization of these areas, which are the engines of the Canadian economy. Recommendations include:

1. Support a metro cities downtown cluster initiative.
2. Strengthen metro areas with a focus on city building, housing, transit, and climate change.
3. Deploy an interprovincial trade accelerator initiative.

Creating a diverse and vibrant downtown Ottawa is critical to the long term cultural and economic wellbeing of Canada's Capital Region, home to 128 embassies, and the gateway to our G7 country. Our city core is the primary asset for our visitor economy which is the front door to every other form of economic development as it showcases our region to entrepreneurs, investors, talent, and students. Tourism generates revenue that reduces the tax burden on the local population and creates amenities the city would not otherwise be able to offer residents in our region.

A vibrant downtown attracts young people, creates energy, and counteracts the historical global profile of being a boring government city as it may be portrayed in the media. Ottawa has been identified as low ranking in Canada and North America for our return to the workplace and the recovery of our downtown. We must act quickly to diversify our economic base and land uses. The challenges we are facing today will only become more complex, and more costly to address. We have a unique opportunity to reimagine a downtown that is more inclusive and resilient than we may otherwise have had the courage to create.

Now is the time for Ottawa to thrive by sharing our strengths and success stories and supporting the levers will generate the greatest impact. **Innovative infrastructure is critical to economic growth and a key factor in determining where people choose to live, and where businesses choose to invest.** We recommend advancing key areas that will optimize our investments and drive the most growth quickly.

1. ByWard Market, Lansdowne 2.0 and LeBreton (including a new event center and arena).
2. New Ottawa Hospital, world class with advanced R&D capabilities and regional reach.
3. Support to leverage our leadership in AV, tech diversity and high tech talent penetration.
4. Strategy for increased direct flights and an integrated transit system for inner city mobility.
5. Increased support for destination development and visitor attraction as a key brand builder.

Finally, small businesses are the cultural and economic core of our communities. They provide jobs, essential services, and unique experiences. They are the foundation of what attracts residents and visitors alike to our region. The entrepreneurs and employees of these businesses are community leaders and supporters and have proven themselves to be among the most driven and resilient of us during these last three years. However, many continue to struggle to rebound.

The rising cost of doing business, access to labour, ever changing consumer and workplace trends have compounded their ability to generate revenue and manage debt. The government imposed counter measures during the pandemic were offset with program support, however did not account for the long recovery of local, small businesses in the hardest hit sectors. Today, faced with the repayment of these loans, we are at risk of losing many that we fought to keep and counted on to drive our future economy.

We recommend the federal government work with all levels of government and economic partners to create new opportunities and reduce barriers for small businesses including but not limited to:

1. Improve access to labour through immigration, settlement, training, and reskilling.
2. Ensure city building and planning that drives affordability, housing, and frictionless transit.
3. Modernize policies and systems to create a culture of service excellence for business.
4. Increase access to capital and programs for small businesses and equity deserving entrepreneurs.
5. Explore the long-term economic impact of elimination, partial elimination and/or deferral of government owned debt for small businesses most affected by the pandemic.

The past few years have been characterized by tremendous uncertainty: a prolonged pandemic, record-high inflation, supply chain disruptions, labour shortages, rising cost of doing business and geopolitical turmoil. If we want our economy and people to emerge stronger amid so much uncertainty, ***Canada must continue to focus on creating the right environment for business predictability, competitiveness, and growth.***

The COVID challenge can be turned into an opportunity if we become visionaries and collaborators focused on priorities that create inclusive and sustainable growth. On behalf of the leaders, members, staff and volunteers of the Ottawa Board of Trade, thank you for your continued commitment to strengthen Ottawa and Canada. Together, we will.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sueling Ching', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Sueling Ching
President & CEO
Ottawa Board of Trade
150 Elgin Street, Ottawa, Ontario