

February 21, 2024

Ron McKinnon  
Member of Parliament, Coquitlam – Port Coquitlam  
3278 Westwood Street, Suite 101  
Port Coquitlam BC V3C 3L8

**Re: Tri-Cities Chamber of Commerce Priorities for Federal Budget 2024**

Dear MP McKinnon,

Thank you for meeting with me to consult on the upcoming Budget 2024. There are a wide range of priority issues for our businesses and communities, and our chamber appreciates the open dialogue. In this letter I emphasize several of the priorities for the Tri-Cities Chamber of Commerce.

**Key Issues for Budget 2024**

**1. Ease the burden of doing business.**

**Accelerate regulatory modernization.** Too often regulators do not give sufficient considerations to economic and impacts on business when making decisions. Acting to modernize our regulatory framework can improve environmental, social and economic protections while increasing investment, growth and jobs. An economic and competitiveness lens for federal regulators would encourage manageable regulations that support economic growth and take into account our competitiveness in the global marketplace.

**Act to reduce interprovincial trade barriers.** While significant efforts have bolstered global trade, internal barriers continue to impede interprovincial commerce. Streamlining internal trade stands as a pivotal catalyst, potentially elevating GDP growth by up to 8% and fortifying Canada's economic foundation. While the Government of Canada has made positive steps, we need to ensure Federal leadership to ensure significant steps are taken to reduce internal trade.

**No new taxes.** As Canadians and businesses from coast-to-coast-to-coast struggle with an increased cost of living, now is not the time to increase taxes on Canadians nor businesses. To ensure Canada remains competitive, Government should launch a comprehensive independent review of the tax system to ensure it is simpler and more fair. We cannot move alone on imposing a Digital Services Tax – and we cannot introduce a retroactive tax: this will have a chilling effect on Canada's investment climate. Similarly, continuing to raise the Excise Tax by 5% will have a negative impact on Canadian consumers and businesses throughout the beer, wine and spirits, value chain, including farmers, producers, retailers, and restaurateurs.

**Targeted support for struggling SMEs.** CEBA was a highly successful program that helped save countless small business during the pandemic. However, many local businesses still need time to get back on their feet as they face the pressures from high interest rates and skills shortages.

## 2. Housing availability and affordability, and homelessness.

All levels of government must work together to improve housing availability and affordability. This is closely connected to the labour market, as the workforce will not live within reach of available jobs if they cannot secure housing. Or, if this housing can't be built fast enough to keep pace with the jobs available or the influx of newcomers to our communities. We know you are keenly aware of this complex issue, and we appreciate the federal government's announcement yesterday of significant support for the BC Builds program as one aspect of this complex issue.

## 3. Invest in the Tri-Cities and Metro Vancouver's urgent transit expansion needs.

Metro Vancouver's transit system can't keep up with demand as our region grows at a record pace, putting further pressure on affordability. To ease overcrowding on our transit system as soon as possible, and to meet the region's future needs, we must have federal funding commitments for the region's transit expansion plan, Access for Everyone, no later than April 2024. With provincial and federal support, TransLink can get much needed new transit service on the road by the fall.

## 4. Reinstate the Canada Digital Adoption Program "Boost your Business Technology" Grant.

The sudden closing of this highly successful program caused businesses, approved CDAP advisors, chambers of commerce and boards of trade to be caught off guard. Initial program information stated the budget was to support up to 70,000 businesses with a \$15,000 grant, yet the program was closed with only 30,000 grants given, or in process of being issued.

## 5. Ensure reliable supply chains.

**Commit to long-term investment through a Canada Trade Infrastructure Plan.** Canada must build and maintain trade infrastructure that dependably and efficiently transports goods to and from market. Domestic and international trade corridors should solidify supply chains to establish Canada as a reliable business partner.

**Expand abilities to head off preventable threats to supply chains.** Recurring labour disruptions continue to inflict damage to Canada's economy and reputation. Government should consider providing new dispute resolution tools, including the authority for the federal cabinet to compel binding arbitration for the resolution of a labour dispute in sectors that are essential to Canada's supply chains, including railways and ports. The Government should withdraw its Anti-Replacement Worker legislation as it will only raise costs on Canadians and businesses and further undermine our trading relationships.

## 6. Attract, develop and retain talent.

**Skills-based immigration programs aligned with regional labour needs.** These can be leveraged to address gaps in the workforce and should be complemented by supports addressing barriers to hiring highly skilled foreign talent. Specific attention is needed to ensure that Canada's SME employers have support to access skilled labour.

**Enhanced upskilling and reskilling to meet labour market needs.** Investing in sector specific upskilling and reskilling programs to support the development of the Canadian workforce.

**Expedite foreign qualification recognition.** Accelerated progress on mutual recognition across Canada is needed for qualified newcomers to Canada to be able to fully contribute to the Canadian economy. Priority sectors include agriculture, childcare, construction, healthcare, and transportation – all of which are critical to growing our economy.

These are among a few of the top priorities for our local communities and national network, that we collaborate on with chambers and boards of trade across the country through the Canadian Chamber of Commerce.

The Tri-Cities Chamber of Commerce is the fastest growing in the province, now among the top five largest chambers and boards of trade in B.C. For more than 50 years we have served Coquitlam, Port Coquitlam, Port Moody, Anmore, and Belcarra, and now represent 1,300+ businesses from every sector. Our Chamber is an active member of the BC and Canadian Chambers of Commerce.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "L. Courchesne", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Leslie Courchesne  
Chief Executive Officer