
**Speech by Mr. Yvan Gauthier, President and CEO of the
Foundation of Greater Montréal, presenting of *Vital
Signs of Greater Montréal 2020***

June 9, 2020

Hello everyone,

Thank you for listening in. I hope everyone is well.

Thank you, Michel, for once again offering us a platform here at the Chamber of Commerce of Metropolitan Montréal, so that we can have a meaningful discussion about our overview of Greater Montréal from the years 2000 to 2019.

Social development and the economy are very closely intertwined. This fact has been brought home to us in dramatic fashion since March of this year: when social conditions and the health of the population are severely impacted, the economy grinds to a halt.

Today, I won't be talking about the pandemic as such, but

it will to some extent be the elephant in the room. To put it another way, what Montréal brings to the battle against this invisible enemy is the product of the city's evolution over the last two decades. Montréal is fighting the pandemic thanks to the strengths it has been able to develop, and despite the weaknesses it has not been able to compensate for.

Let me first tell you briefly about the Foundation of Greater Montréal. Our foundation is part of a network of nearly 200 community foundations in Canada, and we're part of an international movement that is present in more than 60 countries. We are little like the "Caisse de dépôt" of philanthropy, except that we are in large part the owners of the funds that have been created using our framework.

We manage philanthropic funds, we administer foundation assets, and we advise organizations or individuals who want to give back to the community. Currently, we manage assets amounting to nearly 350 million dollars, and we administer nearly 650 funds dedicated to supporting all sectors of our community. This pooling of funds, in addition to generating better

returns on investment, allows us to be more and more engaged in the community.

In 2019, the FGM distributed more than 12 million dollars in grants, and spearheaded major projects like Zero Hunger in Montréal, with a special focus on children. We also have committed to fighting poverty within a common front that includes seven other organizations, thanks to the Collective Impact Project steered by Centraide, and we have supported numerous projects aimed at ending homelessness, and many others.

We want to, and we must, act on the real issues facing our community. With that in mind, every three years, we gather data drawn from a variety of studies and official sources, which we compile in a global picture of Montréal, and we make this report public. For this special edition of *Vital Signs*, which marks FGM's 20th anniversary, we've decided to offer an overview of these last 20 years, so as to measure Montréal's progress in meeting the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

Going back over 20 years was not an easy task, and I

want to thank the authors of this report, our partners at the Institut du Québec for their tremendous efforts. I also want to thank all the members of the Vital Signs strategic committee, who shared with us ideas and knowledge. I have to say that we are still missing quite a lot of data that we'd need in order to fully analyze and understand the city's evolution, and the COVID-19 crisis has made that clear. I do invite you to download the report that we'll be discussing this morning, *Vital Signs of Greater Montréal*, which is available on FGM's website.

As we are at the start of a new decade, we thought it appropriate to look at trends both over the last decade and the past 20 years. I want to say that this exercise is in no way intended to be used to badger or burden our decision-makers. Our leaders, the vast majority of them, be they in Montréal, Quebec City or Ottawa, are acting in good faith, and do their best. What we are pursuing here is an ideal of community well-being. That leads me to also take a moment to applaud the total commitment of our community organizations, which have been working extremely hard to respond to the emergencies this crisis has created. They deserve all our gratitude.

Here at FGM, we are actors who intervene in a positive way, so that we can all better understand what is going on, take the most appropriate action, and better help each other. All of us would like, ideally, to move forward in a straight line, and move quickly. But sometimes the road can be winding, and that forces us to pause, either to overcome an immediate obstacle, or to reflect on what has come before.

We'll start with a high-level analysis and then spend time on some more specific points. First, let's look at the major phenomenon of the last 10 years in Greater Montréal. I'm sure you'll agree that it was the way in which our economy took off. Starting in 2010, and in an even more significant way as of 2015, Greater Montréal really stepped on the gas. Strong economic growth returned Montréal to its status as one of the engines of the Canadian economy. Obviously, that is a big positive: the unemployment rate fell to a historic low, there were advances in education, and in general, the standard of living improved.

From that perspective, the pandemic is a disaster:

because it halted our momentum; because it instantly triggered despair, and led to death, illness and financial insecurity; and we know that the recovery is going to be slow. The pandemic is also a disaster because it is exposing the weaknesses in our community that are going to make recovery more difficult.

These last 10 years did a lot of good. They benefited those who were able to unfurl their sails and catch the prevailing strong winds. However, to be able to take advantage of prosperity, you need to be in good health, and possess the capacity and know-how to be an active participant in that prosperity. That has not been the case for everyone. In order for growth to benefit all, we have to make a conscious, deliberate and determined effort to spread its fruits to the disadvantaged, the vulnerable, the neglected. I am reminded of the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 Agenda, which includes the concept of “leave no one behind” and further urges our leaders to endeavour to reach first those who are furthest behind.

And we did not do enough of that.

The reality is that we did not take advantage of those years of strong growth to build a resilient community capable of lessening the impact of catastrophic events on the most fragile among us. The most obviously tragic example of this is our network of long-term care facilities, the “CHSLDs”. Premier Legault used a very accurate metaphor when he said that COVID-19 getting into a CHSLD was the equivalent of “a lit match in a bundle of hay.” We were confronted with a virus that was unknown, stealthy, a real scientific enigma. Still, how can we have been *that* unprepared? Our underinvestment in CHSLDs had been obvious for years, and successive governments, while not being totally inactive, never made the network their priority.

So, the situation in Greater Montréal, while being one of economic renaissance, was at the same time a missed opportunity to create a more resilient community. All through our report, we see both of these aspects, both sides of the coin.

In general, we have seen poverty diminish over the last 10 years. That is due to some extent to the growth we experienced, and also due to an increase in federal

assistance to families, which is an example of an effective recent social development initiative. But it has not been enough. How can we accept that, coming out of an amazing growth cycle, hunger is still present in Montréal? Indeed, 14 % of Montrealers say they are living with food insecurity. That means that fourteen out of one hundred people living in Montreal do not have enough to eat, or that they are anxious about how they will be able to put food on their table to feed their children or their family. 23 % of single parent families are living with food insecurity. On top of that, 66 % of the individuals who are experiencing food insecurity are in that situation even though they earn income from employment. We have not been able to spread the wealth that resulted from the period of growth.

I do want to reiterate that all is not bleak. Our report also shows improvements in eating habits, an increase in life expectancy and a drop in the suicide rate. Laval and Montréal are in fact the two regions with the lowest suicide rates in the province. Those are positive social indicators.

Now let's talk a bit about education. Montréal is a

paradox in this area. When it comes to universities, it's a world-class city; and yet education is not valued here. The overall level of education is increasing, especially among girls, who make up the majority in almost all university faculties, but we are still seeing a very high dropout rate in secondary schools. Overall, 70% of all secondary school students in Greater Montréal obtain their diplomas in five years, but there are variations of 10 or even 15 percentage points between one school board and another, or between boys and girls. And we are still far below the Canadian average.

We do have a fair number of kids who "drop back in" to school, but the bottom line is that 15% of our young adults do not have a diploma to help them earn a living in a satisfying or fulfilling way. Only 17 % of 17-year-olds who live in youth centres get to the Secondary Five level. The social and economic costs of this are high. A dropout will earn 30 % less income than a secondary school graduate, for example. Our youth continue to be under-equipped.

Let's take a look at another issue. One major development of the last decade, and this in fact goes

back as far as the year 2000, is the improvement in the status of women. We see major progress in education; we see major progress in income levels. We have seen women make gains in terms of getting access to positions where they are decision makers and can exert influence. Let's not forget that Montréal now has its first female mayor. And Montréal is the top Canadian city in terms of the participation of women in the work force. But here too, many have been left behind.

Immigrant women have a much harder time finding employment, and indigenous women are even more marginalized. Also very troubling is the level of violence against women. Between 2013 and 2017, reported sexual offences increased in the Montréal, Toronto, Vancouver and Calgary metropolitan areas. Montréal is where there was the biggest increase. One could ask, has there really been more violence, or is more violence being reported? It's hard to get a clear answer. Keep in mind as well that the #MeToo movement took off in the fall of 2017.

This phenomenon is going to need a lot of attention in the years to come; domestic violence and sexual violence have devastating effects on their victims, who are in the

very large majority women, and sadly, often young women.

Let's wrap up with the state of the environment. There has been progress, particularly in terms of improvement of water quality, in reduction of losses from the drinking water supply, in the increase of the number of protected areas, and a reduction, though small, of the amount of waste we generate.

The city of has reduced its carbon footprint, which is excellent, but we still have a ways to go if we want to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Our environmental progress has been, at most, tentative. Greater Montréal is still being held hostage by traffic congestion, and Montrealers are still addicted to their cars, in particular light trucks such as SUVs. The number of automobiles in circulation continues to increase at a more rapid rate than the population.

I'll end my brief overview of *Vital Signs* here. What is terribly sad is that this pandemic has brought our city's momentum to a halt. Montréal was moving forward, but we were not vigilant enough. We were not able to take

advantage of the golden years to build up enough resilience in our community. That is going to make getting back to normal more complicated. We are going to have to be very alert in the weeks and months to come. I am thinking, for example, of the situation of children who have lost ground in their education and who will have difficulty making up for lost time. Economic challenges are going to exacerbate the suffering in many ways.

Each initiative we take during the recovery should focus on development that is long-term and inclusive. Montréal is an extraordinary city, but it has been struck at its very heart, at the heart of the lives of the elderly, of at-risk youth, of its schools, of its artists. Governments need to be conscious of their economic responsibilities and especially their social responsibilities. They are going to have to more closely align their choices with the Sustainable Development Goals. Businesses, as well, will need to start assessing their health in conjunction with the needs of the whole of society. Foundations, as they pursue their missions, should put more emphasis on contributing to resilience, and should be more agile and open to innovation. And all of us need to understand that

we need each other. We have to act together and not stay in our silos. The decisions we make today are already shaping the future.

That's why our report also presents initiatives from 13 young leaders of the future, solidly engaged in the community, who will constitute the bridge between the year 2020 and the year 2030. You'll be hearing from them at a special event that we'll be organizing this fall. As you probably know by now, my successor Karel Mayrand, whom I congratulate on his appointment, will be the person spearheading this project.

I thank you for your attention in these very special circumstances, and I hope that you will, as individuals and as organizations, be stakeholders in the great wave of change that needs to happen for Greater Montréal to become a more resilient community by 2030.

In closing, I would invited you once again to download our *Vital Signs of Greater Montréal 2020* report from our website, and to read it, share it, and talk about it. The

report is also available in English on FGM's website. Take care of yourselves, and thank you very much!