

# **Presentation by Vivian Doyle-Kelly, Director Ireland-Canada Chamber of Commerce, Montreal**

## **Houses of the Oireachtas' Joint Committee on Enterprise, Trade and Employment**

### **Ireland's Trade Relationship with Canada**

Cathaoirleach, leas-chathaoirleach, deputies, senators, friends. On behalf of the Ireland-Canada Chamber of Commerce, Montreal, I want to thank you for the invitation to speak here today. It is an honor for our organization to be afforded this opportunity to address this important committee.

Formed in 1991, our Chamber is dedicated to fostering close commercial relations between Quebec, the largest of Canada's 10 provinces, and the island of Ireland. We offer support and networking opportunities for Irish companies here through seminars, business lunches, social events and expert lectures. We collaborate with groups such as Enterprise Ireland and Invest Northern Ireland to make the most of business opportunities that exist. We also maintain close links with the IDA, Tourism Ireland and the Ireland-Canada Business Association in Dublin.

As it happens, there has never been a better time for Irish and Quebec businesses to work together. The United Kingdom's exit from the European Union is, we believe, disastrous for Great Britain and, in fact, is not great for anyone. But it does represent an opportunity for Ireland as it relates to Quebec and the rest of Canada. Put simply, Ireland is the perfect location for Quebec businesses to set up their European HQs.

For us in Quebec and for you in Ireland, the advantages of collaboration on trade are clear. The two economies have many similarities. Both are known for their warm welcome and strong entrepreneurial spirit. Quebec's affluent, high-tech industrial society has a can-do attitude extremely similar to Ireland. We are both also strong in a number of key industries, including digital technologies, financial services and fintech, aviation, construction and engineering, education, life sciences and digital health – the list goes on.

Canada's leaders have worked hard to make the country a favourable environment, resulting in the development of the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement between Canada and Europe. One of the most comprehensive tariff reduction packages ever achieved in an EU free trade agreement, since its provisional application in 2017, Irish companies working with the Canadian market have enjoyed the elimination of 98.6% of all Canadian tariff lines, as well as the opening of the Canadian services market to Irish firms.

In recent years, dozens of Irish companies have been operating successfully in the Quebec market, creating significant employment in the process. Some Irish enterprises that are successfully doing business in the Quebec market include Multihog (multipurpose snow removal and street sweeping), SportLoMo (sports tech solutions), Beacon Health, Kingspan, Keenan,

Samco & Prodig (agri-tech and machinery), Combilift (forklifts), Aerogen (healthcare) and Vybe (e-commerce furniture startup). Keywords Studios (gaming) and Aer Rianta International (airport retail) are Ireland's largest employers in Montreal. And there is room for much, much more.

Likewise, Quebec enterprises have found a natural home in Ireland. There is a range of free supports and services for all Canadian companies helping them set up offices in Ireland.

You see, Montreal has a foot in both camps. On the one hand, the city is the fifth most rapidly growing metropolitan area in all of North America and is less than an hour's drive from the U.S. border. On the other, it is a truly bilingual marketplace with French and English being spoken fluently by the majority of people there, making it an attractive location for European and francophone countries around the world who appreciate the diverse and outward-looking business mentality you find in Quebec. That approach has led to more than 70 international agencies setting up headquarters in Montreal, including civil aviation bodies, like the ICAO, IATA and the International Business Aviation Council. Also, the World Anti-Doping Agency and no fewer than five United Nations agencies have HQs there.

Quebec is a world leader in AI, optics/photonics research and VFX development, which is why Google, Microsoft and Meta have chosen Montreal for their R&D centers. It is also a hub for metal transformation, quantum science, mining and the aerospace industry. Many large players are permanently ensconced in the province, including Bombardier, Pratt & Whitney, Rolls-Royce, Bell Helicopter, Lockheed Martin, and Thales, and a long list of suppliers and sub-contractors.

With the lowest energy costs in all North America, Quebec draws many large-power customers, including data centers and other tech-based enterprises. In all, businesses enjoy a 25% operating cost advantage over those in Western Europe. Further, Montreal's highly educated population of 4.3 million provides a ready professional bank of talent for incoming enterprises.

With all this in mind, it is our view that it is time for the Irish Government to establish a full-time professional Consulate General in Montreal, for the province of Quebec. Currently, while Quebec represents almost a quarter of Canada's population, and more than 20% of the Canadian economy, there is no diplomatic or trade representation. If Quebec was an independent nation, it would have the 28<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world. As a result, other European nations have not been slow in setting up permanent Consulates in Montreal. We feel, putting it bluntly, that Ireland is missing out.

The establishment of an Enterprise Ireland office in Montreal in the spring of 2021 was a positive development and there was a very successful trade mission organized in November of that year that saw the Minister for Trade Promotion, Digital and Company Regulation come to the city. Enterprise Ireland provides a very targeted, one-on-one approach for Irish businesses looking to thrive in Quebec. This strategy would benefit exponentially if the Government of Ireland were to provide authorized local representation that would be able to interface directly with the Provincial Government and other Quebec Agencies on an official and equal footing. In effect, this would set Enterprise Ireland up for success.

From a cultural and consular point of view, the appointment would also make clear sense. Since the early-19<sup>th</sup> century, Quebec has been the first point of entry in North America for hundreds of thousands of Irish, with almost half of all Quebecers (both anglophone and francophone) able to claim ancestry. The St. Patrick's Society was founded in 1834 and St. Patrick's Basilica

consecrated in 1847. To this day, the flag of Montreal still proudly sports a shamrock. There is also an active and growing Irish diaspora living in the province, helping to support more than a dozen Irish societies as well as the vibrant School of Irish Studies at Concordia University.

It is our understanding that several new Irish diplomatic missions will be launched in the near future. We believe that Montreal, Quebec needs to be one of them and would build on the efforts of the highly respected and long-serving Honorary Consul, Dr. Michael Kenneally, who has recently retired. For Ireland to have trade and diplomatic missions in Canada but not Quebec would be like setting up in the United States but ignoring New York or Chicago. Your help in advocating for a Consulate General for Montreal would be gratefully received... by hundreds of enterprises, of all sizes, on both sides of the Atlantic.

On behalf of the Chamber and all Irish-Canadian businesses, I thank you again for your attention and your kind invitation to speak today. I wish you every continued success in the hard work of this committee.

Thank you.