Interview: Dominique Anglade – Deputy Premier, Minister of Economy, Science and Innovation, Minister Responsible for the Digital Strategy, Québec

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Quebec's Deputy Premier and Minister of Economy, Science and Innovation Dominique Anglade, who is also the Minister responsible for the Digital Strategy, shares the strategic significance of her portfolios to Quebec's national development, the CAD 205 million Quebec is investing into the life sciences sectors over the next five years, and her belief that Canadians should publicize and take more pride in their achievements.

Minister Anglade, you oversee the portfolios Science, Innovation and Economy. What is the significance of having these three under the purview of a single Minister?

In addition to being Minister of Economy, Science and Innovation, I am also the Minister responsible for the Digital Strategy, which is especially important to the life sciences. The economy has always been a pillar for the Quebec government, but Premier Philippe Couillard wanted to capitalize on the synergies between the portfolios of Economy, Science and Innovation by bringing them together. You simply cannot think of the economy without considering science, innovation and digital. The three pillars of our economic development strategy – entrepreneurship, advanced manufacturing and exports – all focus on innovation.

As a government, we have decided to identify a few key sectors critical to Quebec's economy, and life sciences is one of them. This is because we have great researchers as well as a good base of

companies in the province, and we have had some successes with commercialization, but we can – and should – do a lot more and a lot better.

Never in the history of Quebec have we invested so much in research and innovation. Over the next five years, CAD 2.8 billion will be poured into R&D and innovation within Quebec. This is especially important given the prevailing economic context; despite the rising strands of nationalism and protectionism, we are extremely determined to continue investing in science and innovation. The response to protectionism is not protectionism – the response is to be even more aggressive in investing in innovation and staying open for business.

When it comes to the funding of science, innovation and R&D, sometimes trade-offs have to be made between basic versus applied and translational research. How should a government make these tough decisions?

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We did not want to make that trade-off. The various stages of the innovation chain form a whole, from basic research, to the commercialization of a technology or the implementation of a social innovation, and each of these stages needs to be adequately funded. The Quebec Research and Innovation Strategy we recently launched supports this entire continuum. We also chose to target promising sectors, such as artificial intelligence (AI), for which we announced CAD 100 million to bolster our already thriving scientific and industrial ecosystem. We were able to give ourselves the means to fulfill our ambitions because we have balanced our budget for the fourth year now. Quebec has had deficits before but we are now generating surpluses, which we can reinvest where it matters most..

In addition to basic and translational research, there are two very important elements. The first is developing the next generation of talent in science, from a very early age. The second is to invest in more women entering STEM fields. According to a recent McKinsey & Company study, there is enormous potential GDP growth, both for Quebec and Canada, related to women being more present in the workforce, and being more present in higher-productivity, science-based fields.

In terms of commercialization, the first thing companies and investors talk about is talent. Quebec possesses a great talent base. We have a cluster of world-class hospitals, higher-level institutions, and research institutions, and the fact that Quebec is a French-speaking province within an English-speaking environment has allowed us to build on our diversity to produce a skilled and expert life sciences workforce.

As the 6th-largest metropolitan region in North America in terms of HCLS concentration, providing over 30,800 jobs, the life sciences is very strategic for the Québec economy. How does the Ministry continue to foster an attractive ecosystem for life sciences here?

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In May 2017, along with Minister of Health and Social Services Gaétan Barrette, I announced Quebec's Life Sciences Strategy centered on four core initiatives. CAD 205 million in funding will be invested over the next five years, with the goals being to attract CAD 4 billion in private investments by 2022 and to position Montreal as one of North America's top five life sciences hubs by 2027.

Firstly, we will increase investments in research and innovation, across all life sciences sectors through investing CAD 75 million in an accelerator fund for the establishment of health alliances, including collaborative public-private partnership projects, as well as CAD 11.1 million to improve clinical research processes.

Secondly, we would like to support local companies and their growth by providing access to capital. CAD 100 million has been injected into the BioMed Propulsion program to be administered by Investissement Quebec to provide financial support for life sciences companies to commercialize their research.

Thirdly, we would like to attract new private investments. Attracting FDI has three elements: talent, cost and access. Montreal is well-positioned on the talent side as I mentioned earlier. In terms of cost, Quebec is one of the most cost-effective jurisdictions in North America. Access is a little different in life sciences, because the data aspect is really important. Quebec is sitting on a gold mine of health data. This is actually a benefit of the universal health care system that we have, because we have a strong public sector catering to everyone, and we have access to all the data for academic and industry research. Right now, we have not figured out a way to capitalize on this properly but we are actively looking into this.

The last is the CAD 26.5 million establishment of an innovation office within the Ministry of Health and Social Services. While my Ministry is financing this, the Minister of Health and Social Services will be overseeing the operations, which was the only way to manage such an entity. Both Ministries collaborate closely. We run initiatives like international missions together, but as separate Ministries, it can be difficult to align on the same goals. With this office, we will be able to take new innovations and technologies and test them within the healthcare system.

At the same time, I would like to exhort the private sector to invest more money in R&D. They are not putting enough money here. We are here to help match any industry contributions and provide a lever to drive economic development – but industry needs to partner with us.

Canada has historically been involved in some world-class science and R&D but very often, they are licensed and commercialized elsewhere. How important is it that innovations from Canada are recognized as Canadian globally?

Many Canadians seem to view modesty as a quality. I think it is a big flaw! Nobody has ever been successful because of their modesty. It is quite an empty concept. Now, humility is a quality because you recognize what you are not good at. But modesty? It means you do not even recognize what you are good at!

I think we certainly do not showcase our achievements enough, and we need to do a lot more. It is hugely important that Canadian innovations are recognized as Canadian! We need to bring our scientists and entrepreneurs into the public eye and talk about the pride of being Canadians, especially in this day and age.

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