



QUÉBÉCOIS

BLOC  
2021

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Sir,

Attached you will find the answers to the questionnaire you sent us in the context of the 2021 federal election. We hope the answers provided will allow you to understand our political action better.

In the next few weeks, you will find more details on our website concerning our policies. <http://www.blocquebecois.org/>

Please accept our best regards.

The Bloc Québécois 2021 election team

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## 2021 Questionnaire on the federal election

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### Questions:

- 1. In August, the government announced that it will make vaccination mandatory for all federal employees, under penalty of sanctions.**

**Q. a) What is your party's official position on mandatory vaccination of essential and non-essential public service employees?**

*The Bloc Québécois is promoting vaccination for the entire population. We encourage all public servants to contribute to the collective effort by getting vaccinated. On the other hand, we believe that the imposition of mandatory vaccination by the Liberal government is a discriminatory measure with the strictly political objective of dividing the voters on this question to make electoral gains. This measure appears difficult to apply wall to wall, given the many grievances and labour conflicts that could result from the imposition of disciplinary measures on recalcitrant employees. The many exceptions that could be granted to avoid non-compliance with the collective agreements or to accommodate public servants who have a recognized justification risk making mandatory vaccination a fictitious measure and, in this sense, it appears to be useless, at the very least.*

**b) What types of accommodation measures is your party ready to consider for unvaccinated public service employees?**

*The Bloc Québécois considers that public servants who do not wish to be vaccinated for medical reasons should provide proof of their health condition. They would also have to provide a negative screening test before having access to their workplace and prefer telework to perform their duties.*

- 2. The global COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in unprecedented government spending measures to protect Canadians' health and safety.**

**Q. What are your main priorities in a post-pandemic economic recovery plan?**

*In fall 2020, the Bloc Québécois announced its government spending priorities via its recovery plan entitled *Le Québec choisit, le Bloc agit: COVID-19 recovery plan*. If there is one thing the pandemic has shown, it is the vulnerability of our healthcare system after more than twenty-five years of financial disengagement by the Federal State. This is why the priority of the Bloc Québécois remains an increase of unconditional health transfers to 35%. Having said this, the economic recovery cannot be achieved on this basis alone. In retrospect, it will surely be considered that climate change will represent the biggest challenge that has faced Humanity in its history. We believe we must use the economic crisis from which we are emerging to invest massively in the transition to green energy. We leave fossil fuels behind once and for all. Finally, we believe the public service can be used as an economic development engine for Quebec's regions. Indeed, the pandemic showed it was possible to*

*work remotely efficiently, thanks to new technology. Many public sector and private sector workers took advantage of this evolution to rediscover the beauty of wide open spaces and return to live in Quebec's regions. In a regional development and land use perspective, the Bloc Québécois believes we must encourage this movement and decentralize the public service, not only so that Quebec benefits even more from the work of public servants, but so that public servants can benefit from the sweetness of living in Quebec.*

- 3. According to a Global News report in April 2021, Canada's public deficit is estimated at \$155 billion in 2021 and \$60 billion in 2022-23.**

**Q. How will you attack the public debt while ensuring the maintenance of public services to Canadians?**

*The Bloc Québécois believes that, despite the huge deficits engendered by the pandemic, the federal government's public finances are nonetheless viable in the long term. Indeed, the impact of the deficit on the Federal State's financial viability is not dramatic, because most of the expenditures Ottawa incurred are non-recurring. We need only think of the economic assistance measures, such as the CERB, the CESB, the CRB and the CEWS, which will be phased out gradually when Employment Insurance takes over. The same is true for the economic stimulus measures that were deployed to deal with the crisis. According to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, the debt-GDP ratio will start falling again in the 2025-2026 budget year. Instead of cutting public services and transfer payments to the provinces, which were cut significantly in the context of fighting the deficit in the 1990s, the Bloc Québécois believes that to reduce our debt level, a strategy based on economic growth, taxing the wealthy and fighting tax evasion is the best option to achieve this goal.*

- 4. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, most public service employees have worked remotely or by telework since March 2019. Under the "pathfinder project" of Public Services and Procurement Canada, 200 public service employees recently volunteered to participate in a pilot project that will fuel a broader plan for returning to the workplace.**

**Q. What will your party do to ensure the health and safety of federal public service employees?**

*The Bloc Québécois considers that for a broader return to the workplace to be accomplished healthily and safely, it is essential that the public health recommendations be followed throughout the process. We also believe that the profound transformations the labour market has seen over the past two years justify greater reliance on telework and greater decentralization of the public service to Quebec's regions.*

5. The review of the *Employment Equity Act* is in progress. This has not been done since 1995.  
Q. According to your party, what are the main changes to be made to the current Employment Equity Act and how do you propose to ensure these changes materialize?

*In July, the government announced the creation of an Employment Equity Act Review Task Force. This Task Force's work has barely begun. At this stage, it appears premature to take a position. The Bloc Québécois will wait for this Task Force's report to be tabled before expressing its views.*

6. Raymond Thériault, Official Languages Commissioner, during the tabling of the 2020-2021 [Annual Report](#), indicated that “profound changes [are] needed in the federal public service to ensure effective bilingual services to Canadians”  
With the dissolution of Parliament, all bills, including Bill C-32, *An Act for the Substantive Equality of French and English and the Strengthening of the Official Languages Act*, died on the order paper.  
Given the crucial importance of modernizing the Official Languages Act, do you undertake to table/resubmit a bill to strengthen the capacity of the public service to defend and promote our linguistic duality in the first 100 days after formation of the government?

*The Bloc Québécois will not form the government after the next election. On the other hand, the protection and strengthening of the status of French is at the core of our political party's action. The Official Languages Commissioner's most recent reports have shown that a great many positions posted as bilingual are in fact occupied by unilingual public servants. This inequity mostly occurs to the detriment of French, but also of public safety and the service offered to the public. For the Bloc Québécois, this situation is unacceptable and is the reason why we will propose to the Standing Committee on Official Languages that it undertake a study on bilingualism in the public service.*

*In addition, we will table a bill to subject federally-chartered companies operating in Quebec to the provisions of the Charter of the French Language (Bill 101). We will also resubmit our bill that a sufficient knowledge of French be an essential condition to obtain citizenship in Quebec. We consider that the current Official Languages Act (OLA) does not recognize and account for Quebec's special and unique language situation. Of the two official languages, French is the only one to be a minority language in Canada, with a declining number of speakers across Canada, and the OLA should recognize this fact, in our opinion. We favour a differentiated approach that would introduce an asymmetry of principle into the OLA, in favour of the French language in Quebec.*

**The Federal Court of Appeal recently ruled that federal agencies cannot violate an employee's right to work in French “by forcing him to communicate daily with monolingual Anglophone specialists...” This decision was rendered after a retired public service employee instituted an action against his employer in 2019 because he had to work mainly in English, as his work required “daily contact with monolingual English-speaking colleagues...” He lost in Federal Court in 2019 and appealed the decision.**

**Q. How would your party ensure that the rights of Francophone public servants are protected in the performance of their official duties?**

*The Bloc Québécois is delighted with the Supreme Court judgment in the Dionne case. For us, the right to work in French is non-negotiable and Francophones who work in the public service can always count on the Bloc to defend their interests and denounce the injustices suffered by Francophone public servants*

- 7. The federal government is recognized as the national champion of the promotion and protection of Canada's official languages. However, the quality and uniformity of translation and interpretation are in constant decline. Since 1995, not all translations are subject to quality control by a central body. The lack of quality and uniformity of communications in the two official languages has resulted in substantial financial costs. (Translation Bureau – Economic Assessment of the Service Delivery Model. PWC. September 2018).**

**During the government's 2019 review of the *Official Languages Act*, CAPE recommended that the Translation Bureau become the federal government's Official Languages Centre of Excellence and that the pool of employees be expanded to ensure language quality and uniformity and reduce excessive costs.**

**Q. Do you undertake to implement this recommendation if you form the government? Yes or No? Explain.**

*The Bloc Québécois will not form the next government. On the other hand, we believe that the quality of government translation is an unavoidable necessity to ensure equity between the two official languages in government documents, but also to ensure their clarity and correct interpretation by the vast majority of citizens. During the study of appropriations by the Standing Committee on Official Languages, the Bloc Québécois will question the person who will be Minister of Official Languages on the implementation of these recommendations and on the government's plans to improve the funding of the Translation Bureau.*

- 8. Through its participation in the Joint Task Force on Mental Health and other task forces and committees, CAPE has invested time and effort to keep the government's attention on its employees' mental health, recommending more effective and more numerous measures to support employees struggling with mental health problems.**

**Q. What would your party do to strengthen the current mental health initiatives and what additional measures will you support to remedy the severity of this problem, especially given the additional challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic?**

*The Bloc Québécois salutes the participation of the unions and the Canadian Association of Professional Employees in the work of the Joint Task Force on Mental Health and has always favoured measures intended to improve the welfare of public service employees in the work environment. We will always be open to collaborating with the different public service unions so that the federal government ensures a healthy environment for public servants and, if necessary, that it account for its strategy to ensure its employees mental health.*

9. A total of 188,786 employees from 87 federal departments and agencies responded to the 2020 survey of public service employees, which represents a 61% response rate. On the whole, 11% of the survey respondents said they have been confronted with harassment, and 7% with discrimination.

Q. What measures will your party put in place to fight racism, sexism and discrimination in general in the workplace, whether from supervisors or from colleagues.

*The Bloc Québécois considers that the federal government should set an example and offer a work environment free of harassment and racial and linguistic discrimination. To our knowledge, the Standing Committee on Government Operations has never addressed these questions and our political party is open to working with the public service unions to document this phenomenon and ensure that the House of Commons addresses this question in committee.*

10. Over the past few years, there has been greater awareness of cases of harassment and discrimination in the federal workplace.

Q. What specific measures will your party take to manage these issues?

*The Bloc Québécois is and always will be an opposition party. However our political party nonetheless plays an important role. In fact, it is even fundamental and essential to the proper functioning of democratic institutions, because we have the power and the duty to hold the government accountable to the public. As we have already written, the Bloc Québécois will always be open to working in close collaboration so that the federal government offers public service employees a work environment free of harassment and discrimination.*

11. In June 2021, the Government of Canada announced a [Digital Government Strategy](#) with the aim of digitizing the government to serve Canadians better.

Q. What is your party's position on artificial intelligence and digital transformation in the public service?

*The Bloc Québécois favours the use of digital solutions with the goal of offering better public services to the population, as long as this respects the areas of provincial jurisdiction, the collective agreements and personal privacy, and does not generate additional costs.*

12. Federal leadership is indispensable to fight environmental degradation and global warming. Public programs and budgets are necessary, but the federal government must also set an example internally.

Q. What does your party propose to ensure that government operations are more ecological and sustainable?

*The Bloc Québécois believes the State should be a model to follow in fighting climate change and preserving the environment. For example, it could electrify its fleet of vehicles, develop a green procurement policy, ensure the buildings it constructs or renovates comply with the highest environmental standards, or issue directives to save electricity at night. These are only a few examples of policies that can be implemented easily by the State.*

**13. The Public Service of Canada is one of the most efficient and effective in the world. It is agile, adaptable and attracts competent professionals who are the foundation of our federal government.**

**Q. What is your party's plan to create a workplace that continues to attract and maintain excellence in the federal public service?**

*Our priority in this regard will be to protect whistleblowers. The Bloc Québécois believes it is essential to protect whistleblowers better. The European Union, Australia and the United States are examples to follow in this regard. Conversely, Canada ranks behind the Cayman Islands, Bangladesh, Rwanda, Botswana, Pakistan and Italy, to name only a few. In its March 2021 rankings, the International Bar Association, which compiled 50 laws protecting whistleblowers, ranked Canada last, tied with two other countries. THE International Bar Association awarded Canada a “zero” for 19 of 20 criteria. The only point Canada received in the ranking is due to the fact that it has a law. Since this law is useless, Canada has no other points. This is why the Bloc Québécois will table a bill on government integrity that will be inspired by best practices and respect the 20 criteria proposed by the International Bar Association. The bill will provide that the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner will report to Parliament instead of the government. Our bill will rigorously protect the anonymity of whistleblowers to encourage them to express themselves without fear and will entrust the Commissioner with the power to investigate not only cases of reprisals against public servants, but also the cases of wrongdoing themselves.*

**14. Many issues affect the performance and effectiveness of federal public service employees.**

**Q. According to your party, what is the most urgent question affecting public service employees, and why?**

*Resolving the problems with the Phoenix pay system, prevention of workplace harassment and protection of whistleblowers appear to be the main issues that concern federal public service employees.*

**15. In May 2020, the federal government announced that SAP (a German multinational that creates business management software) had been chosen to replace the Phoenix pay system, which has plagued thousands of public sector employees due to persistent problems.**

**Q. What lessons did your party learn from the financial and technological disaster of the Phoenix pay system and how will you ensure that public service employees are not affected by similar or new problems with a new system?**

*We learn the following lesson from this disaster: while the federal government is trying to impose national standards for healthcare and interfere in areas of provincial jurisdiction, it is simply incapable of paying its own employees, which we consider to be a minimum requirement for any employer. The word “scandal” is not strong enough to describe the situation federal government employees have lived with for the past six years. The Bloc Québécois will keep an eye on the federal government in the deployment of new software to replace Phoenix, because no one wants to see the payroll problems reborn from their ashes.*