

## Major public sector demonstrations held everywhere in the Gaspé Peninsula

GILLES GAGNÉ

NELSON SERGERIE

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

BONAVENTURE, GASPÉ AND MARIA - On November 21, the Common Front representing public sector workers commenced a three-day strike. Major protests were held in Maria, Bonaventure and Gaspé throughout the strike.

Maria witnessed the convergence of 400 people in a significant midmorning demonstration uniting government employees, including a substantial number of teachers and health sector employees along Highway 132 in front of the hospital.

The collective strength of public employees in Maria was further amplified throughout the day, with a continuous influx from various sectors converging to the hospital area, resulting in an additional influx of hundreds of people beyond the peak of 400 during midmorning.

On November 22, over 400 people demonstrated in Bonaventure, at the intersection of Highway 132 and Grand Pré Street, the main commercial avenue of the town. Throughout the day some protesters rotated with their colleagues, undoubtedly increasing the number of protesters beyond 400.

Approximately 7,300 residents of the Gaspé Peninsula and Magdalen Islands are members of one of the Common Front unions. They want a salary increase of 21% over five years, which corresponds to the expected rate of inflation over that period. Regionally, the rate of support for the strike reached 90%, which was the same percentage recorded elsewhere in Quebec.

### Gaspé

On November 23, more than 500 people protested in Gaspé.

The atmosphere was festive as the union organizations offered coffee and snacks to peo-

ple who were gathered near the Gaspé arena before undertaking a journey downtown. From there, the union representatives led the members to the rest area, located on the other side of York River, for the last pressure tactics gathering of the week.

"For me, it affirms our mobilization and that we can no longer endure what is happening at the current moment. For me, that's what it says to the government: things have to change, you have to come to negotiate at the bargaining tables so that there are real changes to working conditions of all our members," says the president of the Eastern Quebec Education Workers' Union, Anne Bernier.

"They want to talk about their priorities which are not necessarily ours. The government wants to constrain us to the detriment of our members," she adds.

Serge Saint-Pierre, the president of the Central Council of the CSN Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine, believes that these three days of strike will have changed things.

"We hope it will shake things up, especially with the arrival of the conciliator but we are still waiting for the results. We hope that the government will wake up a little, that it will listen to the workers and respond to all demands in health and education. These systems are barely held together by workers. We must keep in mind that 78% of them are women," maintains the president, recalling that these workers are not compensated for being on picket lines.

The desire to obtain decent working conditions is also reflected within the APTS, which represents professionals and technical staff in the health network.

"We see that this is increasing at the negotiating table where we obtained additional days to the negotiating table.

Cont'd on page 16



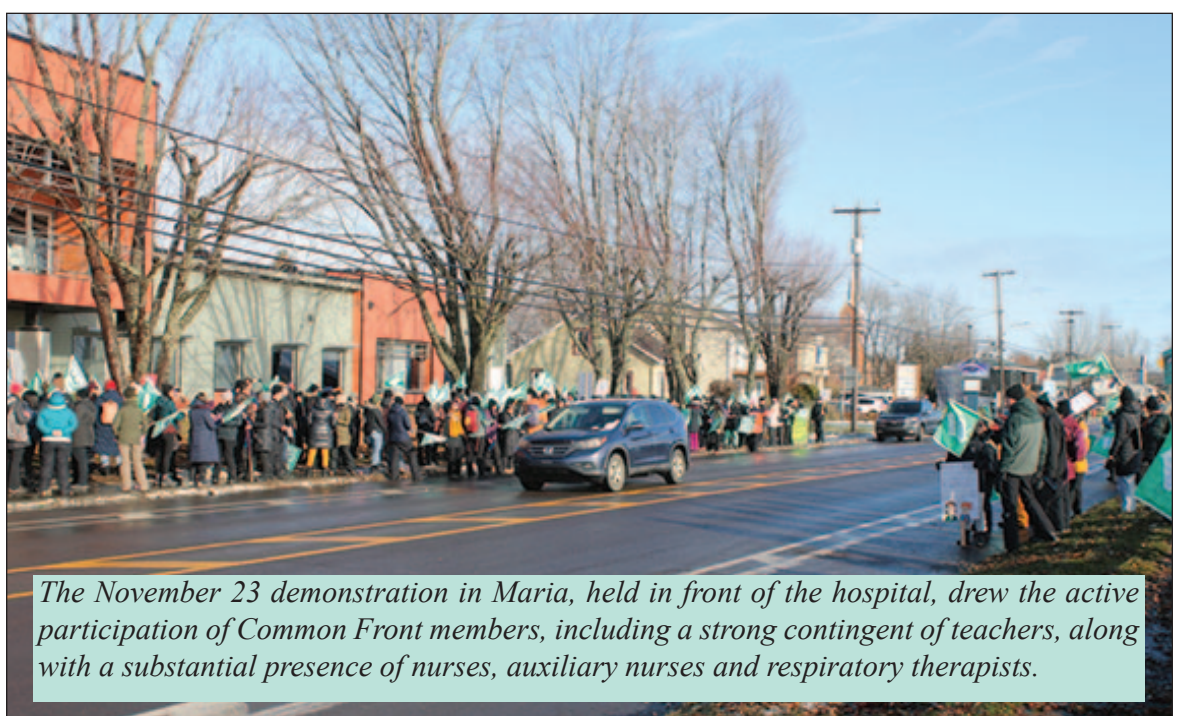
Members of the Common Front slowed traffic on the Gaspé bridge during the November 23 march between downtown and the rest area.

Photo: N. Sergerie



The November 22 demonstration in Bonaventure saw the collective efforts of nearly 400 individuals from various unions.

Photo: Steve Loisel



The November 23 demonstration in Maria, held in front of the hospital, drew the active participation of Common Front members, including a strong contingent of teachers, along with a substantial presence of nurses, auxiliary nurses and respiratory therapists.

Photo: Gilles Gagné



# François Legault announces increased efforts for Port Daniel to Gaspé rail advancement

GILLES GAGNÉ

NEW CARLISLE – On November 17, Quebec Premier, François Legault, gave the green light for the launch of the most important calls for tenders for the repair of the Gaspé railway, focusing specifically on the Port Daniel to Gaspé portion of the railway.

This third segment of the Matapedia-Gaspé railway, will require an investment of \$518 million and is slated for completion in the fall of 2026. To accelerate the work which began in May 2017, the Quebec government will consolidate contracts associated with the Port-Daniel to Gaspé section into four major calls for tenders.

Premier Legault linked the need to restore rail traffic between Port Daniel and Gaspé, where no train has passed since 2014 due to deteriorating infrastructure, to the wind development plan by Hydro-Quebec. The remaining repairs predominantly involve upgrading bridges, replacing culverts, building retaining walls and, at times, moving the track away from cliffs or the shoreline.

“It’s important for what’s coming, for the wind energy boom,” summarized François Legault, alluding to Hydro-Quebec’s ambitious plan to procure 10,000 megawatts of electricity from wind sources by 2035. This initiative represents an output nearly three times greater than the current power generated by the already established wind farms in Quebec.

François Legault revealed that Michael Sabia, the president of Hydro-Québec, is even tempted to launch calls for tenders representing four times the wind power currently installed in Quebec. The premier emphasized the need to revolutionize transportation habits in Quebec, stating “where we are the kings of trucking.”

In a pointed reference, though not explicitly naming the LM Wind Power blade manufacturing plant in Gaspé, Mr. Legault highlighted that the expansion of the wind power sector would also generate manufacturing jobs within the province.

“To send out the blades, we need the railway. (...) It will also be important to bring back the passenger train,” insisted Premier Legault. The latter



Photo: G. Gagné

*MNA for Bonaventure, Catherine Blouin; Quebec Premier François Legault; President of the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie, Éric Dubé; and the MNA for Gaspé, Stéphane Sainte-Croix took advantage of their visit to New Carlisle to take a glimpse at the work being carried out on the railway line there.*

part of his remark was pertaining to the federally owned carrier VIA Rail, over which he has no control, he reminded the attendees.

## Delays and commitments

The Matapedia to Gaspé railway repair project has encountered numerous delays since 2017, first under the Liberal Party government of Philippe Couillard, then since the arrival of the Coalition Avenir Québec in October 2018. A particularly challenging period between June 2020 to February 2022, lasting 20 months, was characterized by the absence of publication of calls for tenders relating to this railway.

Despite \$310 million being disbursed or committed in the railway, not a single kilometre of additional railway line has been put back into operation. Since Transports Québec put the Caplan-Gaspé sector on hold in 2015, work mainly focused on the Matapedia-Caplan portion at first but, since the beginning of 2022, the Caplan to Port Daniel stretch has been targeted for further upgrading.

In fact, the network, made available to the freight transporter, the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie, has lost a few kilometres of functionality since the end of the spring.

François Legault, who obviously ignored that detail, indicated on November 17 that the entire Matapedia-Caplan section remained functional and that its repairs were completed.

In reality, the few trains oc-

asionally serving Caplan have been unable to travel beyond the Henderson Road area of New Richmond since the beginning of the summer. This limitation is due to the replacement of a culvert and the impending relocation of the rails east of the Black Cape area of New Richmond, near the municipal limit of Caplan.

In 2020, Transports Québec committed to reopening the Caplan-Port Daniel section by the end of 2022, a commitment that, at the end of February 2022, was postponed until the end of 2024. Simultaneously, the repair timeline for the Gaspé network, which, in August 2019, François Legault committed to finishing in 2025, has now been pushed back to 2026.

Responding to inquiries about potential delays affecting the completion of work up to Gaspé, François Legault replied that “it is a commitment that we made, but that (Transport Québec Minister) Geneviève Guilbault also made. As you know, there is an election in the fall of 2026, and we want it to be done before the election.”

The overall refurbishment of the Matapedia-Gaspé section should cost \$872 million upon completion in 2026, according to Transport Minister Guilbault’s statement during her visit to Gaspé on June 27.

The mention of this amount on Friday prompted Mr. Legault to say that “it is more than (the sum devoted to the coming of the) Los Angeles

Kings,” referring to the controversy surrounding the \$5 million to \$7 million subsidy announced on November 14 by Finance Minister Éric Girard to ensure that two exhibition games are presented in Quebec City in October 2024.

The Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie is currently transporting cement, woodchips, lumber and steel along the New Richmond to Matapedia line. However, cement traffic faces stagnation as the product has to be trucked between the Port Daniel cement plant and the New Richmond terminal. The high transshipment cost for customers located relatively close to the Gaspé Peninsula makes it impractical to transfer loads from a truck to a railway car.

Initially, a 2022 reopening of the line between New Richmond and Port Daniel, as expected, would have allowed the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie to make up for the May 2022 loss of windmill blade traffic. Input for the cement plant could also bolster rail traffic between Matapedia and Port Daniel. However, both aspects are currently on hold until the line is functional as far as the Saint Mary’s Cement Plant. The railway passes through that plant’s property.

The entire Matapedia-Gaspé line spans 325 kilometres (202.4 miles).





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**Friday December 8th, 2023**  
**9:00 AM-12:00 PM**  
**New Carlisle Town Hall**

**This month's activity: Christmas Wreath  
Decorating with Gail Atkins**

\*Space is limited. Please RSVP by Tuesday December 5th to Melissa Mercier at 418-752-7265 or by private message to the Family Ties Facebook page.

This project is funded in part by the Government of Canada's  
New Horizons for Seniors Program



# Police report

The preliminary hearing of Lisette Hautcoeur, 60, accused of the non-premeditated murder of Richard Allard in Chandler on July 16, 2022, commenced on November 20 at the Percé courthouse. Both the criminal prosecutor, Émilie Landry-Therriault, and the defence were expected to call ten witnesses. Quebec Court Judge, Jules Berthelot, is presiding over the case.

Although the case is scheduled for two weeks, Ms. Landry-Therriault pointed out on November 22 that the preliminary hearing “could be shorter as it is progressing faster than expected.” There are indications that the hearing might conclude within a week.

The body of Richard Allard, 64, was discovered in his home, an apartment located on Mgr Ross Street East. Following the discovery, investigators conducted a thorough search for clues over a three-and-a-half week period.

Lisette Hautcoeur, identified as a suspect, was arrested on August 11. Ms. Hautcoeur resided in close proximity to the victim’s apartment, and investigators from the Sûreté du Québec revealed that she had known the victim before the events on July 16.

On November 20 at the Percé courthouse, Marc-Jules Chouinard, 48, one of the two individuals charged following the tragedy that claimed the lives of two young men on May 10 in Rivière-au-Renard, was released. Mr. Chouinard faces charges of two counts of manslaughter, two counts of dangerous driving causing death, dangerous driving, and attempted murder of one of the victims, Gabriel Noël. Quebec Court Judge, Denis Paradis, issued a written decision outlining the ten conditions of Mr. Chouinard’s release. These conditions include adherence to a curfew, a ban on communicating with the relatives of victims and witnesses of the May 10 events, and he is also forbidden to consume alcohol. In addition, Mr. Chouinard was required to pay \$10,000 bail. He is scheduled to return to court on January 22.

Meanwhile his son, Simon Dufort-Chouinard, 18, also from Rivière-au-Renard, faces charges of premeditated murder, non-premeditated murder, and dangerous driving in connection with the same incident. Mr. Dufort-Chouinard has been remanded in custody since his May 10 arrest and is set to appear in court again on December 11. The tragedy claimed the lives of Gabriel Noël, 19, and Dylan Samuel-Francoeur, 18.

One or several individuals could face charges following the illegal killing of a mountain caribou, whose remains were found on October 15 close to the Parc de la Gaspésie limits. The female caribou wore a telemetry collar and was one of the two pregnant females captured before last winter and put in an enclosure. She was released in August. The meat is being preserved as evidence in an ongoing investigation.

That investigation is being conducted by the Quebec Government Wildlife Protection branch. The suspects were met with by wildlife officers on October 18. So far, the Wildlife Protection branch has only communicated through a press release. The investigation was initiated by a team of agents who were at the scene with a canine squad and a drone pilot. A fine of \$20,000, could be imposed if the suspect is found guilty of poaching. The amount will be doubled if it is a second offence. A similar incident involving the shooting of a caribou occurred in 2018.

Meanwhile, up to 240 investigations were opened by Wildlife Protection officers as part of the Panache Operation in the Gaspé Peninsula and the Lower Saint Lawrence regions from October 13 to 19. In a detailed partial report released on November 20, Wildlife Protection services point out that 6,400 people were interviewed, and more than 500 charges could be laid as a result of the interventions, which could result in more than \$275,000 in fines. In addition to the caribou, 43 moose, a lynx and two grouse were seized as part of the Panache Operation. Additionally, two weapons were seized. The meat that was still edible was donated to community organizations. Approximately 100 agents took part in the operation.

On November 13 at the Percé courthouse, Cathy Anglehart, 44, from Chandler, confessed to defrauding her town’s Municipal Housing Board, generally referred to as OMH, of more than \$12,000. The following facts, admitted by the accused, were presented in the courtroom by criminal prosecutor Isabelle Gavioli.

“Ms. Anglehart was appointed director of Chandler’s OMH in July 2021. Following her appointment, she had a credit card produced in the name of the OMH which she used for personal purposes until November 2021. Over this period, she made personal purchases totalling \$11,961.71. On occasions, she settled the credit card balance using OMH funds. She also purchased \$585.15 worth of products for her personal consumption at the RONA hardware store in Chandler, charging the amount to the OMH account. Upon being confronted by OMH board members regarding her expenses, she resigned. The day after her resignation, she provided a check for \$4,500 to the OMH and a second check for \$5,000. Subsequently, she repaid the remaining balance and covered the cost of accountants hired by the OMH to inspect the OMH’s finances. The total amount of the fraud was \$12,546.86, and Ms. Anglehart has fully reimbursed the stolen funds.

Defence attorney Yves Desbiens has requested a presentence report. The sentencing representation is scheduled for March 13.



As the search for Jessy Duchesneau, 19, from Paspebiac, missing since the early morning of November 4, continues, the Quebec City Police Department is diligently working to analyze the data from Jessy’s cellular phone. An expert hired for this purpose is still in the process of examining the device to gain insights into Jessy’s disappearance.

“There is nothing new as far as the investigation is concerned. Our investigators are still trying to find clues that could lead to finding Jessy, and to verify scenarios, even if they are not currently on the street,” explains communication officer William Robitaille.

“As for the phone, we were told that the data of an old cellular phone would be available in a minute but the situation is quite different with the last generation of devices. It can be very long before getting access to data and nothing guarantees that the expert will be successful in doing so,” adds Officer Robitaille.

The phone was found in an underground parking lot a few hours after the young man was reported missing. It was found near the second location where surveillance cameras recorded Jessy Duchesneau walking along Prince Edouard Street, close to the bridge passing over the St. Charles River. The family recognized the phone. The first camera capturing Jessy’s movements was situated near the bar where he spent some time before 3 a.m. on November 4.

The Contraband Investigation Division of the Sûreté du Québec, in collaboration with the Operational Support Coordination Office, carried out an operation related to tobacco smuggling on November 20 along Highway 20 in the Kamouraska region. Police carried out a search, in addition to arresting a 30-year-old man from Dalhousie, New Brunswick, believed to be involved in contraband and the sale of illegal tobacco. The arrested individual may face charges under the Tobacco Tax Act, possession of methamphetamine, and obstructing a peace officer in his duties. Authorities are also investigating whether the suspect was also engaged in selling illegal tobacco in the Gaspé Peninsula, particularly around Pointe-à-la-Croix. During the search, law enforcement seized nearly 130 boxes containing approximately 1,300,000 cigarettes. Additionally, about 10 methamphetamine pills were confiscated. A vehicle and a trailer, considered as infringing property used for transporting illicit goods, were also seized.

As part of the operation, a 23-year-old woman from New Brunswick was also arrested and could face charges of possession of methamphetamine. The Contraband Investigation Division's mandate is to fight, in collaboration with Revenu Québec, against tobacco smuggling throughout Quebec in order to ensure the integrity of the Quebec tax system and thus recover used goods and assets used by the offenders. The Sûreté du Québec reminds the public that any information on tobacco contraband can be communicated at any time and confidentially to the Criminal Information Centre at 1-800-659-4264.

Isaac Moffat Swasson, 33, from Listuguj charged with multiple violent crimes, will stand trial between April 22 and April 26 at the Quebec City courthouse. Quebec Court Judge, Annie Trudel, rendered the decision during the accused’s November 21 court appearance. Isaac Moffat Swasson faces a charge of mischief exceeding \$5,000 for damages to the New Carlisle prison on April 30, 2019. During that time, he was imprisoned because he was and still is facing charges of assault and uttering threats tied to events that had occurred on February 21, 2019, in Listuguj.

“The first two days, April 22-23, will be earmarked for the Listuguj case, and the court will deal with the New Carlisle prison case over the three following days,” explains criminal prosecutor, Maxime Rocheville Paradis. From now on, the two trials will be conducted by a Quebec City-based criminal prosecutor, Franceline Lamoureux-Auclair. As of November 21, Isaac Moffat Swasson was still looking for a lawyer to defend him.

A Montreal-based criminal prosecutor is tasked with handling crimes allegedly committed by Isaac Moffat Swasson during his imprisonment at the Bordeaux penitentiary in Montreal. One crime is related to drugs, and he is also suspected of orchestrating a hostage incident that occurred on October 6. As of November 23, he had not yet been charged in that particular case.



Gilles Gagné

Commentary

Chrystia Freeland couldn't count on much wiggle room

Canada's Finance Minister did not have much wiggle room when she presented her November 21 fall economic statement. She couldn't announce broad new spending because that is known to feed inflation and therefore affects interest rates to a certain extent as well. She had to find measures that would have a direct impact on the population.

She chose housing, which represents a rising problem for the three levels of government, federal, provincial and municipal. Despite the recognition of the urgency in addressing the shortage of housing units, the federal contribution outlined in the economic statement looks, for now, like a drop in the bucket.

It might lead to the development of 90,000 to 100,000 units. This falls significantly short of the estimated 2 million units needed in the country by 2030.

The federal government, like that of all provinces, neglected the housing files not only over the next decade but over at least the last quarter of a century, despite encouraging a growing number of immigrants to choose Canada as their new home. It is impossible to backtrack to 1998 in that file.

The Bloc Québécois and the New Democratic Party greeted Chrystia Freeland's economic statement coldly. The position of their respective leaders, Yves-François Blanchet and Jagmeet Singh, is common. The finance minister and deputy prime minister came up too late with measures to increase the number of housing units, and the results will be disappointing.

However, nobody should expect a House of Commons vote of disapproval regarding the spending contained in the economic statement. The Bloc Québécois and the NDP will do the math to find enough members of parliament to approve those measures and refrain from forcing the Liberal Party minority government to launch an electoral campaign in the coming months.

The government mainly bought time with the housing measures, hoping that the added spending of \$20 billion over the coming year, along with the \$15 billion cuts in existing spending, will not contribute to feeding inflation and therefore convince the Bank of Canada to lower its policy interest rate.

Chrystia Freeland's wish is that the compounded effect of downward inflation and interest rates will benefit Canadians early in 2024 and will have a lasting effect until the fall of 2025, the expected election period at the federal level.

The \$40 billion deficit expected for the current year is certainly a bit higher than what the Finance Minister was anticipating in March when she tabled her yearly budget. The rising interest rates are also increasing the government's interest bill, which has gone from 3% of the country's total expenditures to 10% over the last four years.

It remains far from the debt load during the Pro-

gressive Conservative Party years of Brian Mulroney, between 1984 and 1993, when the debt payments represented 30% of the federal government's total spending.

Currently, Canada's annual interest payments almost match what the federal government is handing out to the province as unconditional health payments.

For now, however, Canada is keeping its AAA credit rating and has the lowest per capita debt of the G7, the world's seven leading economic countries.

What would Pierre Poilievre do?

If the Bloc Québécois and NDP leaders gave a cold shoulder to Ms. Freeland's economic update, the leader of the Conservative Party, Pierre Poilievre, attacked it mercilessly, as expected, calling it "disgusting" and using a lack of nuance that has become his trademark.

As leader of the Official Opposition, it is normal to see Pierre Poilievre criticize the government, especially around budget time or the economic statement that inevitably follows in the fall.

Since gaining leadership in September 2022, Mr. Poilievre's position against the Liberal Party government is founded on a simplistic principle: exaggerated federal expenditures generate all of the people's woes. Those expenditures have fuelled inflation which, in turn, has fuelled interest rates.

On November 20, Pierre Poilievre probably felt triumphant when he saw a Scotia Bank analysis attributing 2%, of the Bank of Canada 5% actual policy rate, to government expenditures. At the beginning of the pandemic, in March 2020, that policy interest rate was down to 0.25%.

What the Conservative Party leader didn't mention during his interpretation of the 2% governmental impact on the interest rate is that Scotia Bank pointed out that 0.7% of the rise comes from provincial government spending, and 0.2% stems from the country's municipalities. This leaves 1.1% to the federal government.

Moreover, Scotia Bank explains that 0.80% of the 1.1% is linked to the federal spending carried out to support people and businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic. One can wonder what the economic situation of Canada would have been without that support between 2020 and 2022.

This leaves Pierre Poilievre to play with a mere 0.3% impact on the policy interest rate stemming from federal spending directly tied to non-pandemic measures since March 2020. He also neglected to mention that most of Canada's provincial governments are currently managed by conservative-minded regimes.

So, 85% of the interest rate hike Mr. Poilievre attributed to the Liberal Party government was mis-

leading, an inaccurate math calculation, bad faith, a lie, or all of the above.

To make things worse, when the Conservative Party leader was asked by journalists and Liberal Party Members of Parliament where he would cut to balance the country's budget, he briefly mumbled infrastructure programs and the Green Fund, which holds a yearly budget of \$1 billion.

Pierre Poilievre didn't go further, even if he was very far from a \$40 billion count. Besides his regular verbal abuse and his pit bull manners, the main problem with him remains. He displays a tremendous lack of substance. One-liners make good headlines, but they don't prove that you can run a country.

Challenges ahead

Canada's government debt over the gross domestic product, in other words, the debt-to-GDP ratio, should decline over the medium term, but it will likely rise to 42.7% in 2024, which is much lower than in most industrialized countries.

The upcoming challenge for the country rests in its capacity to deal with the burden generated by its fast-growing population during a housing shortage. Rising rents currently account for one-third of Canada's inflation rate.

That inflation rate and, as a consequence, the surgical spending approach made by Chrystia Freeland might send Canada into a recession. The high number of mortgage renewals over the next two or three years will also contribute to the economic downturn.

The National Bank of Canada expects the policy interest rate to decrease from 5% to 4% in 2024. While this remains a modest fall, the economic downturn might convince the Bank of Canada to reduce it a bit more, which would give a break to the citizens.

However, more concerted efforts must be channelled towards curtailing the housing crisis. Annual rent increases currently reach 6% in Canada. Given, as mentioned above, that rent contributes to one-third of the overall interest rates, it will be very difficult to bring the inflation rate below 2% in that context.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Go, Alouettes, Go! I'm quite disappointed that neither the mayor of Montreal nor the premier of Quebec mentioned the unexpected victory of the Alouettes in Ontario over the weekend.

Anyway, I was "beyond happy." I love American football. I've always had a hard time following a "puck."

Vivian Beebe,  
Montreal, Quebec

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# PORT DANIEL TO GASPÉ CALL FOR TENDERS: Where will the work start?

GILLES GAGNÉ

NEW CARLISLE – Substantial track work has been carried out since 2019 east of Port Daniel, particularly along the Chandler to Barachois stretch, barring a few spots where coastal erosion has caused damage.

Shortly after Premier François Legault's visit to New Carlisle on November 17, Transports Québec delivered a press release offering insights into the first major call for tenders that will launch an intensive series of works to be carried out between Port Daniel

and Gaspé. Nine structures are mentioned in the document.

In the case of that call for tenders, the primary focus will be on the stretch between Grande Rivière and Haldimand. In Grande-Rivière, the huge trestle passing over the town's river will be upgraded. Additionally, a small wooden bridge and a culvert west of the big bridge, along with another wooden bridge to the east near the municipal boundary of Grande-Rivière and Sainte-Thérèse-de-Gaspé, are slated for upgrades. The two wooden bridges will be re-

placed with concrete culverts. A culvert will also be replaced in the Cape Cove area, while a medium-sized bridge and the huge curved trestle in Prevel will be upgraded.

In Douglastown, a culvert will be replaced and, in the

Haldimand area, a small wooden bridge will be replaced by a concrete culvert.

It wouldn't be surprising to see that the regrouped call for tenders reach the vicinity of \$100 million dollars, considering the size of the Grand River

and Prevel trestles and the individual costs associated with culvert replacements, especially those built above former wooden bridges made of creosote-treated wood. Contractors have until January 17 to submit their bids.



The Prevel trestle, located about one kilometre inland near Brilliant Cove, is part of the first major calls for tenders issued to deal with the upgrading of the line between Port Daniel and Gaspé.

## CAQ explores new measures to support regional air transport

Gilles Gagné

NEW CARLISLE - Facing criticism since November 10 for the abolition of the Assistance Program for the Maintenance of Essential Regional Air Services, Quebec Premier, François Legault, indicated during his visit to the Gaspé Peninsula on November 17 that his government is actively working to reshape its support initiatives.

The Assistance Program for the Maintenance of Essential Regional Air Services had a budget of \$10 million for the six-month period that started on April 1, 2023, but the program was not extended beyond September 30. Upon axing the program, the government did not clarify if the allocated funds were fully utilized.

"We are trying to negotiate with different companies to reach three to five-year agreements that will provide air services in the regions," said the premier.

He stressed that certain companies are experiencing difficulties recruiting and training staff and that this element is delaying the implementation of a new air service formula.

The discontinuation of the program has already prompted Pascan Aviation to cease connections to Mont-Joli, Sept-Îles and Wabush as of December 4.

Layoffs at Pascan Aviation, which serves the Gaspé and Bonaventure airports, have been underway since November 10.

The Coalition avenir Québec government was unclear until November 6 about extending the \$10 million program for another period and mentioned to aerial service providers such as Pascan that the November 7 budgetary update might include provisions for such an extension.

Quebec's Department of Transport justifies the end of the Assistance Program for the Maintenance of Essential Regional Air Services, stating it was implemented as an emergency measure at the onset of the pandemic. They claim the pandemic situation is now over, and ridership returned to pre-COVID crisis level earlier this year. However, they were unable to provide data to support that statement.

## PUBLIC NOTICE

### Ministère des Ressources naturelles et des Forêts

YOUR OPINION MATTERS!

#### PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON GASPÉSIE FOREST MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

November 28 to December 22, 2023

The Ministère des Ressources naturelles et des Forêts invites the public to take part in a public consultation on the 2023-2028 Gaspésie operational integrated forest management plans (PAFIO).

Forest operations, such as timber harvesting, land preparation, reforestation, thinning, construction and repair of multi-purpose roads, is potentially scheduled in certain public forest zones of Management Units 11161, 11262 and 11263.

To consult the plans and send your comments:  
[Quebec.ca/consultations-foret-gaspesie-iles](https://quebec.ca/consultations-foret-gaspesie-iles)

You have until December 22, 2023, at 11:59 p.m. to submit your feedback.

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The MRNF's teams are available to inform you about the consultation, answer your questions and help us issue comments, Monday to Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 12 noon and from 1 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.:

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Québec

# François Legault discusses various issues relevant to the Gaspé Peninsula

NELSON SERGERIE  
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

GASPÉ - During Premier François Legault's visit to the Gaspé Peninsula on November 16 and 17, wind power emerged as a central topic in discussions with the region's elected officials.

On November 16, the premier met with the elected representatives of the MRCs of Rocher-Percé, Côte-de-Gaspé and Haute-Gaspésie. The following day, discussions continued with counterparts in the MRCs of Avignon and Bonaventure.

A critical challenge highlighted was the bottleneck preventing the development of a large-scale wind farms east of Rivière-du-Loup. The current limitations in the Hydro-Québec network hinder the transportation of the untapped wind potential of the Gaspé Peninsula estimated at approximately 6,000 megawatts. This issue gains significance given the substantial energy needs of the province.

"We will need a lot of renewable energy in the coming years. What is less expensive is wind power and Hydro-Québec wants to triple wind capacity in Quebec. We will concentrate in regions where there is social acceptability. This is the case in the Gaspé Peninsula. It is part of Hydro-Québec's plan to build new transmission lines to be able to get more electricity out of the Gaspésie. We are going to resolve the situation with the transmission lines and we want a lot more wind power in the Gaspésie," explains the premier in an interview with *magaspésie.ca* during his tour.

Another major issue for the region according to Mr. Legault is the upgrading of the emergency and of the intensive care units at Maria Hospital. When in Carleton-sur-Mer in July 2020, he also spoke about that same issue.

The board of directors of the Gaspé Peninsula Integrated Health and Social Services Centre (CISSS) adopted a resolution in September requesting that this project be included in the Quebec Infrastructure Plan (PQI).

The elected officials of Bonaventure and Avignon have also adopted resolutions to this effect.

Mr. Legault has not made a firm commitment regarding

Maria Hospital.

"It's an issue that Catherine (Blouin, MNA for Bonaventure) and Stéphane (Sainte-Croix, MNA for Gaspé) talk to me a lot about. The next PQI is in the spring budget so, in April 2024. I hope to be able to include it in the PQI in the spring because we really need to renovate the Maria hospital," mentions the premier.

The current emergency department was built 50 years ago.

The modernization of these two acute care sites will be carried out while waiting for a new hospital, the current building having been built in 1954.

In June 2018, the Gaspé Peninsula CISSS adopted a resolution to move forward with new construction, a scenario that dates back even before the creation of the CISSS.

The housing crisis persists in the Gaspé Peninsula despite the incentives put in place.

Mouvement Desjardins, in its economic outlook, estimates vacancy rate is 0.3% in the region and 0% in Gaspé.

The premier mentioned the very recent agreement between the federal and provincial governments which puts on the table an additional \$1.8 billion to create 8,000 additional housing units.

"If you do a little calculation, that means an average aid of \$225,000 per unit. I spoke about it with the mayors, and they were all open to saying that they should be able to find developers who will build and offer affordable rentals," said Mr. Legault.

He wants to accelerate the construction of these housing units in the coming months, especially since Quebec has launched a training program to obtain 5,000 additional workers in construction.

"There will be social, affordable and middle-class housing. The important thing is to cover all requests, and I think that, with the program submitted, we will be able to do that," believes the premier.

In the fishing sector, considering the shrimp crisis and moratoriums, Mr. Legault focuses on diversification, particularly emphasizing redfish. Expecting a drop in shrimp quotas, he urges Ottawa to swiftly allocate redfish quotas for next year.

"We cannot perform a mir-



Photo: Premier Legault's team

*Journalist Nelson Sergerie was able to speak for nearly 15 minutes with Premier François Legault on November 16 in Gaspé.*

acle if the resource is not there, hence, the importance of continuing to diversify fishing as much as other sectors such as wind power," analyzes the premier. Despite the fisheries crisis, the unemployment rate in the Gaspé Peninsula is at an all-time low.

With the current fisheries crisis, people may in some cases be forced to change sectors.

"We will help them get through it financially in terms of training but we want predictability for shrimp," adds Mr. Legault.

In a logical continuation, the premier is unable to confirm whether a short-term announcement will be made for the creation of the Blue Economy Zone with Grande-Rivière and Rimouski as potential main hubs.

"Currently, there are around thirty proposals for innovation zones in Quebec. The areas that we want to prioritize in the short term are the areas where there is private investment. I was told that, for this area, there was \$750 million in private investment. It is certain that if it materializes, we will be able to announce it quickly," the premier limited himself to saying while those involved in the matter wanted an announcement by the holidays and even put forward an investment of \$1 billion.

Regarding overall economic development, Mr. Legault has big goals for wind power.

"I think we also have untapped potential in high-end

four season tourism. We are currently looking into this matter but I think that by tripling wind power, we will have jobs for everyone," says the elected official.

Mr. Legault notes that Minister of Energy, Pierre Fitzgibbon, is looking into the issue of gasoline prices, which are on average 10 to 15 cents higher in the Gaspé Peninsula than in large centres.

"He took action in the matter in Quebec (City) where the situation was similar. He is analyzing the situation in the Gaspésie, but we will not accept that oil companies make excess profits on the backs of Gaspésians," says the premier. However, the government will not be adopting a decree, as has already been done elsewhere, to set a maximum profit margin in the region.

On cell phones reception, several areas in the Gaspé Peninsula remain without coverage, notably Saint-Elzéar, where a national alert for an armed shooter was sounded in September 2022... everywhere except in the municipality.

The promise made in 2022 still stands.

"We promised in 2022 that, by 2026, everyone would have cell service. We will deliver the goods," promises Mr. Legault.

On the electoral map, the region is fighting to keep the status quo, despite the commission's proposal to merge Gaspé and Bonaventure and transfer the MRC of Haute-Gaspésie to the riding of

Matane-Matapédia, in the Lower Saint Lawrence.

The premier is not ready to put into law an exceptional status for the ridings of Gaspé and Bonaventure, as is the case for the Magdalen Islands.

"We must look and the Electoral Officer must look to make an exception for the Gaspésie because it is a huge territory, even if it means having a few more voters in the other counties because we cannot increase the number of counties: 125, it is the same number as in Ontario which has approximately 40 or 50% more voters," explains Mr. Legault. However, he does not want to directly intervene in the independent process.

Regarding the caribou situation, Mr. Legault reiterated that the government's position has been known for months.

"The two ministers responsible for the file are looking at various scenarios. Our goal is to have a balance between jobs in the forest and save as many caribou as possible. We must not think that it will only be on one side," expresses the premier, noting that many families depend on the forestry sector for their livelihood.

According to the latest figures from the Ministry of Wildlife, in 2021, the caribou population was estimated between 37 and 40, compared to 32 and 36 during the fall 2020 flyover. For 2022, based on data obtained by Environnement Vert Plus, the population is estimated between 32 and 36 animals.



# Perception has changed when it comes to the wind energy sector

## Once unloved, it is now considered a most affordable energy source

GILLES GAGNÉ

NEW RICHMOND – The addition of 10,000 megawatts of wind capacity over the next 12 years, as announced on November 2 by Hydro-Québec’s new president, Michael Sabia, in his action plan for the utility, confirms the spectacular turnaround of an energy sector that faced much adversity for the better part of the 15 or so years leading up to 2021.

From the early 2000s until February 2021, the wind energy sector was criticized quite heavily by many politicians, news commentators, analysts, and citizens. Since then the tide has gradually turned, for various reasons, including the cost of energy per kilowatt/hour.

Even Premier François Legault, who firmly denigrated wind energy during the 2018 election campaign, sided with this sector in February 2021 by announcing that the Apuiat project, proposed by the Innu of the North Shore, would be erected.

Frédéric Côté, the Director General of Nergica, a renewable energy research and innovation centre located in Gaspé, can explain the change of a more positive perception of the wind energy sector, over the last three years, in three main points.

“The first element is low costs, a relative question, compared to other options. Also, Quebec lends itself well since we have good wind regimes, electric heating is present, and winter winds are stronger, which creates a concordance of strong winds in winter and peak energy needs. Wind power also has an advantage in terms of deployment speed, especially when compared to large hydro-electric dams. A wind project can be completed in four years,” says Mr. Côté, noting that wind, although intermittent, goes well with hydroelectricity.

Although he appreciates Michael Sabia’s plan, Mr. Côté is cautious, considering that wind farms with a total capacity of 10,000 megawatts (MW) will be erected by 2035, a substantial increase from Quebec’s current 3,900 MW. “What we have on the table is generational, of major magnitude. How to do all this deployment, these new lines, these new wind farms? This will have to be done according to what the territory is capable of absorbing. Local authorities, as we have seen, are capable of accepting

wind farms but all partners will have to work together. This is one of the pitfalls that we must be vigilant about,” points out Frédéric Côté.

It will undoubtedly take some time before Hydro-Québec initiates new wind energy tenders since the public corporation is busy managing its last two calls for tenders, totalling 2,280 MW of renewable energy, mainly from the wind sector.

“The action plan will result in 1,000 MW per year, for 10 years. We will remember that Hydro-Québec’s first major call for tenders (in 2003) was just at 1,000 MW,” notes Frédéric Côté.

### No Quebec or regional content standards

In the plan unveiled on November 2, Michael Sabia neglected to mention the imposition of incentive standards for Quebec or regional content in order to promote the manufacturing sector for components such as blades and towers, born from calls for tenders issued between the years 2003 to 2013.

Michel Letellier, President and Chief Executive Officer of Innergex, the largest owner of wind farms in Quebec, specifies that this situation is generated by a few factors, notably the urgency involved in getting the next wind farms operational, and cost management influenced by inflation and interest rates.

“Innergex-Cartier was at the forefront, with Marmen and LM during the 2003 call for tenders,” he says, speaking of the towers ordered from the Marmen plant in Matane and the blades acquired from LM Wind Power in Gaspé. These components equipped wind farms representing 740 MW of the 1,000 MW of energy wanted by Hydro-Québec 20 years ago.

“We see less of that, the Quebec content requirements. Cost comes into play. We hope that Quebec manufacturers will be able to source some of the components. There are towers in Asia that are very competitive. There is always this balance that we must take into account. There is also a labour shortage. There is less urgency now than 20 years ago when we needed to revive the Gaspé Peninsula,” specifies Michel Letellier.

Frédéric Côté also noted that Quebec or regional content



Photo: Photo provided by Nergica

*Frédéric Côté, director general of Nergica, notes that wind energy can be deployed in four years, therefore, much faster than a power dam.*

standards are excluded from Michael Sabia’s action plan. During the decade following 2003, tenders submitted by wind energy developers received additional points based on the proportion of content, particularly that coming from the “designated zone” of the Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine administrative region and the MRC of Matanie.

“That is not part of the current considerations. We are paying the price for the slow years when there were no calls for tenders in Quebec. The players (component manufacturers) have moved towards export. The emphasis is placed on other aspects, including the participation of the community (the regional energy authorities) in the wind farms,” notes Mr. Côté, referring to the period 2014-2022.

LM Wind Power, with a substantial backlog of blade orders for American offshore wind farms, will keep the Gaspé plant in operation for at least the next three years. These 107-metre blades are the longest manufactured in the Americas.

From the summer of 2016 to the summer of 2022, LM exported blades, used for the renewal of existing wind farms, to the southern United States.

However, the Marmen steel tower plant in Matane has faced challenges, being partially or completely shut down over the last two years and is currently running out of contracts.

“I think they (Marmen management) will be able to seek contracts soon. They are alone

in Quebec, if not across the country. I think we see (on the part of Hydro-Québec) a desire to seek competition,” points out Frédéric Côté.

While waiting for the next calls for tenders, Innergex is proactively studying wind patterns in several Quebec regions to determine the best suitability for wind farms. “We don’t take chances. We want to be present everywhere: on the North Shore, in Lac Saint-Jean, in Lanaudière, in Mauricie, in the Gaspésie, in the Lower Saint Lawrence and in the Eastern Townships,” specifies Michel Letellier.

He believes it will be possible to lower the production cost of future wind farms to around

6 cents per kilowatt/hour, which is cheaper than the cost of the La Romaine complex. The latter is often presented at 6.4 cents by Hydro-Québec, an undervalued amount according to experts, maintaining that the utility doesn’t take royalties into account, nor the fact that it can spread its payments over 60 years or more, which cannot be done by wind farm developers bound by 20-year contracts.

A study carried out by the American firm, Lazard, indicates that the wind cost per megawatt/hour fell by 71.85% worldwide between 2009 and 2021 inclusively in updated dollars.

The cost of installing a wind farm currently hovers around \$2.5 million per megawatt (MW), sometimes a bit more or a bit less.

Comparatively, the last power dams built by Hydro-Québec, in La Romaine, erected between 2009 and 2023, cost \$7.2 billion for 1550 MW. The cost per megawatt stood at \$6.45 million, two-and-a-half times more than a MW of wind energy.

Although power dams produce continuously, the current estimated cost of installing a power dam propels the per MW cost to \$10 million, or possibly more, which confers a clear advantage to wind energy, cost wise, despite its intermittency.

Wind farms usually deliver energy to the grid according to a 35 to 38% production factor. This means that wind farms generate at full capacity the equivalent of 35 to 38% of the time.



Photo: Photo provided by Innergex

*The president and chief executive officer of Innergex, Michel Letellier, says his company will soon submit projects in key regions of Quebec where wind farms are likely to be built.*





Photo: Facebook Town of Percé

The announcement of the cancellation of the consultation published by the Town of Percé.

# PERCÉ TOURIST FEE: Consultation postponed

NELSON SERGERIE  
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

PERCÉ - The consultation promised by the mayor of Percé on the tourist fee, scheduled for the end of November, has been postponed to a later date.

In a social media post, the Town of Percé indicates “that due to an uncontrollable situation, the five public consultation sessions relating to the tourist fee file, which were to take place between November 24 and 30, at the Pavillon des Grandes-Marées, are postponed to a later date.” The announcement did not specify a future date for the consultations.

Following this announcement, a citizen contacted the town, and the municipality responded that “The schedule is no longer compatible for one of the organizers. We are working to find a time that will suit everyone.”

The mayor of Percé, Cathy Poirier, did not return calls from SPEC seeking further clarification on the situation.

During the last municipal council meeting, the mayor mentioned wanting to hear from citizens, merchants and other people involved, as was previously committed by the town. A \$6,000 contract was approved to hire a consulting firm to facilitate these meetings.

Citizens present at the meeting questioned the need for such consultations when the Court of Appeal has not yet heard the case, suggesting that waiting for the decision might be prudent. In response, the mayor stated, “We’re going ahead.”

On June 16, the Superior Court invalidated the tourist fee, adopted on September 28, 2021, and amended on June 14, 2022. Judge Isabelle Germain wrote in her 24-page decision that “the Court is of the opinion that both Regulation 575-2021 initially adopted by the defendant and Regulation 600-2022 are void in that they do not respect the enabling powers prescribed by the LCV (Editor's note: Cities and Towns Law) relating to municipal fees. It is true that this framework allows a municipality to enter into an agreement to make a third-party collector of the fee, but this role of collector cannot be imposed as in this case. In doing so, she exceeds her powers.”

The judge adds that “the Court can only note (...) that the provincial legislature has not delegated to the municipalities the power to regulate the collection of such a fee without prior agreement.”

In July, the Town of Percé appealed this decision, and a date for the hearing has not yet been set.



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Photo: N. Sergerie

Work is underway at Newport wharf.

# Ottawa aims for Newport wharf project to stay within \$15M budget

**NELSON SERGERIE**  
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

NEWPORT - The ongoing reconstruction of the Newport wharf stands out as one of the most impressive undertakings in recent years within the Gaspé Peninsula.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada estimates the first two phases at around \$10 million, but the director of the DFO for the region, Éric Saint-Laurent, remains cautious.

“We have the estimates that were made from the plans and specification but there are still certain amounts that will need to be clarified when we have the final offers from the contractors,” notes Mr. Saint-Laurent, acknowledging the impact of inflation on project

costs. The work will be concentrated between the lobster boat and mid shore wharves, with planned dredging spanning a length of 100 feet.

Luc Legresley, the president of the Newport Port Authority, envisions a comprehensive project exceeding \$20 million. Mr. Saint-Laurent remains optimistic, stating, “I think these figures are realistic, but let's hope the government gets the best work at the best prices. If we can get offers that go below that, the public will be satisfied.” He refers to a budget of \$15 million as a potentially “good price” during discussions.

The amounts for subsequent phases remain undisclosed, as it will be up to the politicians to announce them.



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# More forest fires in 2023

NELSON SERGERIE  
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

BAIE-COMEAU - According to its provincial report presented on November 14, the Société de protection des forêts contre le feu (SOPFEU) revealed that the Gaspé Peninsula witnessed an increase in both the number and size of forest fires this year.

In the region, 29 fires destroyed 54.2 hectares, surpassing the decade-long average of 20 fires and 15.8 hectares. One hectare covers a surface of 100 metres by 100 metres.

SOPFEU spokeswoman Isabelle Gariépy notes that, unlike northern Quebec, the Gaspésie region was fortunate. "It's the fire lines that can bring large fires during the summer. That's what was avoided in the Gaspésie. We



had a lot of rain and a little more humidity (than northern Quebec)," says Ms. Gariépy.

The Québec government is providing SOPFEU with \$16 million for equipment and improved practices, although the regional distribution of these funds is yet to be determined.

### Recruitment Challenges

Despite the region's relative respite from severe fires,

recruiting forest firefighters remains a challenge. To be a firefighter for SOPFEU, candidates require professional training in logging or to have studied in a forestry-related field.

"Basically, (it is useful) to have a knowledge of the forest, which the people of the Gaspé region have. That can help you become a forest firefighter," mentions Ms. Gariépy as one of the criteria.

## Gaspé Peninsula had an impressive tourist season

NELSON SERGERIE  
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

MATANE - The Gaspé Peninsula has had another record summer, according to data released on November 22 by Tourisme Gaspésie.

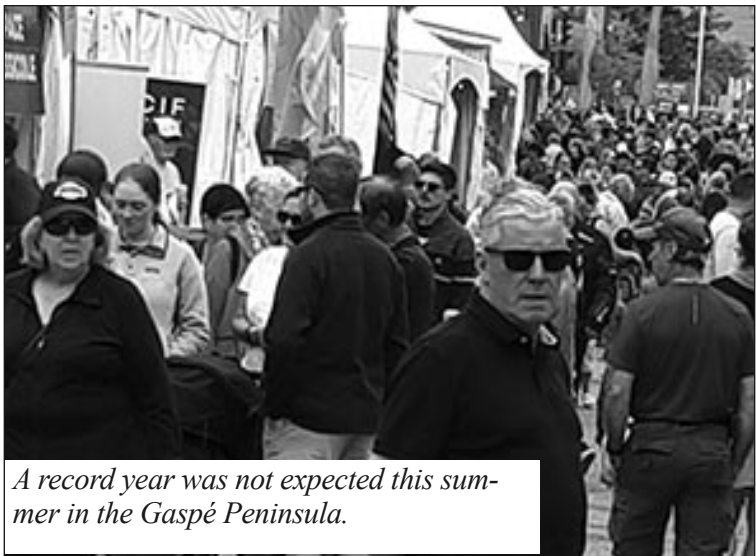
For the period from May to September, the regional tourism association estimates that more than 600,000 people visited the Gaspé Peninsula, generating economic spinoffs of approximately \$379 million. This marks a notable increase of 5% in visitor numbers and an 11% rise in economic benefits compared to the same period in 2022, where 570,000 visitors contributed to \$340 million in spinoffs.

"We were afraid in the spring when we saw that in the estimates, we were in decline, but ultimately it ended well," underlines the director general of Tourisme Gaspésie, Joëlle Ross.

"I think the economic benefits are more important for our tourism businesses than the number of visitors. What's important is how they spend when with us," continues Ms. Ross.

The director explains the somewhat unexpected results in terms of attendance and economic benefits for the 2023 tourist season are due to a variety of reasons.

"I think the pandemic has brought people to Gaspésie who had never been before. I think word of mouth is very



good. We work very hard to target our promotions based on the customers we want to have with us. It's lots of little things that make people come to us. Now, we have to welcome them if we want them to come back to us," says Ms. Ross.

According to Tourisme Québec, the number of occupied accommodation units set records for each month from May to September 2023, resulting in a 5.4% increase for the entire season compared to 2022.

Preliminary data from Camping Québec indicates that the occupancy rate of campsites in the Gaspé Peninsula in 2023 is comparable to the previous year, with a slight decline noted for ready-to-camp campsites.

Attractions and activities experienced a slight decrease in attendance.

This decline is more pro-

nounced in outdoor interpretation activities, while there is an observed increase in visitors to indoor interpretation places. The rainy summer weather could explain this situation.

The festivals, for their part, had an excellent season.

Catering establishments are reporting a season very similar to that of 2022.

Among the hundred respondents to the Tourisme Gaspésie Season Review survey, half described the season as satisfactory or excellent.

### International customers are back in Gaspésie.

"We have a few foreign tourists in our statistics this year which is good overall because these are people who arrive later in the season or earlier, which is interesting and it is a clientele who spends a little more and stays a little longer," says Ross.



The spruce budworm epidemic remains very active in the eastern Gaspé Peninsula.

## Spruce budworm remains active

NELSON SERGERIE  
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

GASPÉ - The Society for the Protection of Forests against Insects and Diseases (SOPFIM) reports that, following its 2023 spraying season, the spruce budworm epidemic remains stable in the Gaspé Peninsula.

In the region, 1.4 million hectares are subject to defoliation, mainly in the area located east of Route 299.

"It's really at the tip of Gaspésie. For several years now, we have seen the epidemic continue. The spruce budworm is present in large quantities," says the director general of SOPFIM, Éric Lacroix.

In 2022, 1,453,000 hectares were defoliated, while this year, the calculations are 1,434,000 hectares, reflecting a reduction of around 20,000 hectares.

"It's a small drop, but it's minor. We can practically say that the SOPFIM program will be maintained next year," says the director.

Despite this significant decrease in the epidemic in the Lower Saint Lawrence,

the same trend did not translate to the Gaspé Peninsula.

"For the moment, we are planning to treat around 150,000 hectares. It should be a mirror year to 2023," says Mr. Lacroix.

SOPFIM operates five bases to cover the territory of the Gaspé Peninsula: Sainte-Anne-des-Monts, Gaspé, Grande-Rivière, Bonaventure and Charlo in New Brunswick.

Since forest fires in the northern part of the province made it impossible to carry out spruce budworm treatments, the available planes were redirected to the Gaspé Peninsula.

"We had a less favourable temperature than in past years for spraying. Lots of cold temperatures, wind, and fog. It was a special situation in the Gaspé Peninsula in 2023, compared to what we saw last year. The fact that we had more planes was offset by the bad weather this year," says Mr. Lacroix.

Spraying will be done between mid-June and early July in the Gaspé Peninsula, contingent on weather.

Tourisme Gaspésie has invested \$700,000 to ensure significant visibility for the destination until the end of September among French-speaking and English-speaking customers in Quebec, as well as on the Maritimes market.

According to the organization, the performance of this investment exceeds expectations, and web platforms have recorded excellent results.

The winter, which has not yet left a visible trace until now, does not worry Tourisme Gaspésie, as snowmobilers

typically only start arriving in mid-January.

"Every year, we are lucky when we have good snowfalls in December. Clients plan their trips to Gaspésie from mid-January, February until the end of March," mentions Ms. Ross.

For the entirety of 2023, the statistics should be comparable to 2022.

"We expect the same figures as last year. And we hope that next year will be better. But what is important is what tourists will spend with us," emphasizes Ms. Ross.



# Gaspesian Soul Writers attracts new members at weekend event

CYNTHIA DOW

MARIA: A group of both experienced and aspiring writers met at the Centre d’Action Bénévole (CAB) in Maria on Saturday, November 18, for a series of workshops offered by Gaspesian Soul Writers. The group aims to encourage Gaspesians to express themselves in writing, whether it be fiction, non-fiction, poetry, stories, or some other form.

At the event, four workshops were offered, with Bilbo Cyr outlining how to organize and tell a compelling story, Mary Robertson describing how to get published, and the group leader, Jennifer Willett, outlining how to express character’s emotions rather than describing them outright. Cynthia Dow provided tips on writing nonfiction articles. The lunch was sponsored by CASA, with the CAB supply-

ing their meeting room for free.

Gaspesian Soul Writers has a private Facebook page with about 31 members. On Saturday, it gained a few more, all eager to learn about the craft through workshops, writing prompts, and positive feedback from their peers. New member, Johane St-Onge, told SPEC, “I write to understand myself, question things, and let go of things; to get closer to my essence.”

The group has held a variety of events in the past, including overnight retreats with authors from outside the region. When asked why she formed the group, Jennifer Willett said, “When I realized how many others share the passion of writing but had no support, I knew I had to do something, and that is how Gaspesian Soul Writers was born. Going on five years old this coming spring, GSW is a



Photo: C. Dow

A small but enthusiastic group met to write together on November 18. From the left, top row: Bilbo Cyr, Sharon Leggo, Jennifer Willett, Miriam Nellis, Johane St-Onge. Seated: Mary Robertson, Josette Boudreau.

group of talented writers who encourage and support each other, and we have a lot of fun along the way!”

For more information, or to request to become a member, you can visit the group’s Facebook page at Gaspesian Soul

Writers.  
(Full disclosure: Cynthia Dow has been a member of the group since its inception.)

## First Snowfall

The sight of snow fills me with dismay. Then, I look more closely. In the early morning light, my backyard is transformed. The simple fall grasses are partially covered in white, with the green showing through, a soft dark green with splashes of earth tones sprinkled here and there. Where the grasses are long or shaded by overhanging boughs, they’re tan-coloured, even golden. Softly shaded, tone on tone, with none of the bold, look-at-me hoopla of spring or summer, yet this season has its own quiet, understated beauty. Why didn’t I see this before?

I dress and go outside. Right out of bed, it’s an effort to get moving. Yet the very effort slows me down, and makes me notice. Walking, taking steps. Leaving a footprint. Crunch. And the snow that blankets the ground—suddenly I see it, as if for the first time.

A patch of snow looks granular, feathery even, demanding a closer look. What’s surprising is that the snow isn’t homogenous at all, but particular, with each individual flake seeming to stand out. Moreover, it’s not the monochrome I expected. It’s not just white, but rather a myriad of colours, a muted patchwork of whites, grays, silvers, and

darker colours, not quite black, but something softer, more akin to chocolate. At my feet is the first snowfall of winter, and it looks like a piece of very fine off-white lace—gorgeous.

It’s not that I haven’t seen beauty in winter before, although the very thought of its approach fills me with dread. Why? I’m sure I can think of a host of reasons, or excuses, if you prefer: the cold, the dark, the effort to slog through snow, the problematic ice, winter driving. It’s most likely none of these, but rather that winter isn’t another season. It isn’t spring, which I adore.

In spring, I’m uplifted at the rain squalls that make the brooks brown and roaring and the appearance of the first green grasses along the foundations of the house. I eagerly await the first coltsfoot (small dandelion-like flowers), the first dandelion and daisy, each new plant like the visit of an old friend you haven’t seen in a long time. And summer, too, is a constant blooming bounty along with heat and light. Fall can be crisp and beautiful with coloured leaves of every hue. Then winter and the long wait begins, or so it has always seemed to me. Many creatures sleep the season away, and I’ve often longed to do the



## New Carlisle dart club honours members

Joan Imhoff

On Thursday, September 28, the New Carlisle Dart Club celebrated the commitment and loyalty of its longest-standing members. Dart club president, Stephen Leberre, who has also been a member for over two decades, presented certificates to four individuals who have been part of the club for more than 20 years.

The honoured members are: Rose Alma Legresley, Mary Woods, Jeffrey Bourgaize, and Kathy Grant. This recognition is a testament to their dedication to the New Carlisle Dart Club over the years.

same.

But now, it feels as if something has shifted. The sudden appearance of such stark beauty has opened my heart which was filled with judgment. Maybe now I’m ready

to stop finding fault with winter because it’s another season and be open to what it has to offer. Instead of making up my mind about it, this year I’m going to wait and see and try to look at it with fresh eyes, like the kids do. Chil-

dren see without preconception or expectation, a kind of magic and the source of all wonder. When snow comes, they run outside, seems like a good idea.

- Constance Brochet

# New Carlisle Funeral Association extends support in times of need

DIANE SKINNER

NEW CARLISLE: As funeral costs continue to rise, the New Carlisle Funeral Association (NCFA) stands as a beacon of assistance during challenging times, providing both financial relief and alleviating some of the burden experienced by families. The New Carlisle Funeral Association (NCFA) is a nonprofit organization that can offer you support if you become a member of the group.

Started in 1998 by Doris Belisle, the group has helped over 290 families in New Carlisle with funeral costs. Expenses are kept low because a group of dedicated volunteers manage member records and organize fundraising initiatives. Notable among their initiatives is the always popular 50/50 draw, offering participants a chance to win \$1000. Currently the volunteers are Mary Woods, Gail

Atkins, Dorothy (Dot) Walker, Betty Ann Crozier, Katherine McMeekin and Willie Bourdages.

Membership is open to all New Carlisle residents, with no specific age requirement. To join all you need to do is fill out a membership form and indicate where you would like the payment to go in the event of your death, whether that be a funeral home or a family member. Forms are available from one of the volunteers or at the New Carlisle Town Hall.

Annual dues are \$25, payable in January each year. If you join from September to December, the initial fee is \$12.50. Once you join, there is a one-year waiting period. If you pass away after the first year the payment is \$1,000, after the second year \$2000 and after the third year the payout is \$3000 which is the maximum amount payable.

It is required that you must be a member in good standing

in order for payments to be made which means that your dues and contributions should always be up-to-date.

When a member passes away, all other members are required to contribute \$8 which can be given to one of the volunteers or deposited at the Town Hall. This is payable by cash, cheque, or E-transfers. To send an E-transfer, the email address is newcarlislefa@gmail.com. If your bank requires that you provide a question and answer, type in “Year” as the question and the answer is the current year – example this year it is 2023.

The volunteers who are carrying on Mrs. Doris Belisle’s important initiative invite you to join the New Carlisle Funeral Association. Becoming a member not only supports a worthy cause but also provides invaluable peace of mind for you and your loved ones during a difficult time.

# Salles des spectacles to host Jolene and the Gambler country music show

GILLES GAGNÉ

NEW RICHMOND – Country music enthusiasts might be interested in an upcoming show at New Richmond’s concert hall on December 2 at 8 p.m. as Annie Blanchard and Maxime Landry will present their Jolene and the Gambler performance, where they will sing many of Dolly Parton and Kenny Rogers’ iconic songs.

Both artists will also perform hits from Garth Brooks, Johnny Cash, Shania Twain, Willie Nelson and Hank Williams, along with songs from Quebec singers like Patrick Norman, Renée Martel, and Gaspesian-born Paul Daraiche. The duo will be accompanied by a full band.

“They are francophones who sing in English and French. At times, they also sing medleys of some artists,” says Éric Normandin, spokesperson of New Richmond’s concert hall.

“I always loved Dolly. For as long as I can remember, I was impressed by this strong woman, this talented and unique artist whose music played in the living room during my childhood. Her friendship with Kenny was so



Photo: Courtesy of Éric Normandin

Annie Blanchard and Maxime Landry are set to captivate audiences with their Jolene and the Gambler show on December 2 in New Richmond.

influential in his life and career. This album and show happened naturally and the magic took root,” points out Annie Blanchard in a press release about the show.

“This show is a journey through the greatest classics and the most beautiful melodies of country music from yesterday to today. When Kenny left us on March 20, 2020, I immersed myself in his work. The memories that his powerful songs

brought back in me soothed me. I knew I had to pay tribute to him. Bingo! The dice are rolled, the bets are made! We're going to do an album and a show, a tribute to Kenny and Dolly,” adds Maxime Landry.

The starting point of this collaboration between the two country artists is their friendship, forged many years ago when each of them starred in La Voix, the Quebec version of The Voice.

## Reflections

by  
Diane Skinner Flowers



## Let’s Make Soup

*Let's make some soup cause the weather is turning cold.  
Let's stir it together 'til we are both grey and old.  
Let's stir it together 'til it tells us stories of its own.  
Let's make some soup cause the weather is turning cold.*

It is that time of the year when people get serious about soup-making. Yes, you can buy many kinds of soup in a can. However, homemade soup is a totally different entity. The whole process is part of the true enjoyment of the soup. The chopping, sautéing, and simmering all combine to produce the most truly lovely aromas in your kitchen. Besides, a big bowl of soup warms you up from the inside on a cold and blustery evening.

Why do people prefer homemade soup to canned besides the gorgeous smells? You can use up veggies and meats that are leftover in the fridge. No waste. You made a turkey? Now use the meat and bones to make a turkey soup! Throw in any vegetables that you have that will suit the soup that you are making. Then add whatever else you want to make it hearty such as rice, barley, noodles, or diced potato. Every homemade soup is different based on what the cook has available in the kitchen.

Often chock-full of vegetables and lean protein, soup is a nutritious meal. You can add a handful of spinach or kale to raise the nourishment the soup provides. Add some fresh herbs for an extra kick of flavour or add cilantro to chicken soup for a unique flavour boost. Continuing on the plus side, soup often has fewer calories than a typical “meat and potatoes” meal.

Let the soup simmer. Do not rush it. This is another bonus to making soup. It does not have to be served immediately. In fact, the longer it simmers, the more flavour it will have. You have things to do? Your soup will be waiting for you.

Making soup can be relatively simple. It is a one pot meal. What cook doesn’t like that? Cleanup is quick and easy. Once all your ingredients are in the pot, sit back and relax.

Another plus to making your own soup is cooking in large batches and freezing containers to have at a future meal. If you serve your soup with a baguette and cold butter and cheese or even a side salad, you will be so grateful that you made that large pot of soup. Making soup is a solid example of doing something that is a gift to your future self.

Nothing makes you feel cozier on a winter’s evening than a wood fire and a hot bowl of homemade soup. Musician Hawksley Workman had it right. “Let’s make some soup because everyone feels the cold.”

*We'll make enough to feed everyone that we know.  
We'll make enough to feed everyone that we don't.  
Let's make some soup because everyone feels the cold.  
-Song by Hawksley Workman*





ARIES – Mar 21/Apr 20  
You may have difficulty reaching people this week, Aries. Whether it's difficulty getting attention or tech issues affecting communication, use the situation as an opportunity to relax.

TAURUS – Apr 21/May 21  
Taurus, a challenging project may lead you to throw yourself into work even more than usual over the course of the week. Remember to take time to exhale.

GEMINI – May 22/Jun 21  
Visit someone in person if you are looking to catch up or have a meaningful conversation, Gemini. Skip impersonal text messages or social media posts and meet face-to-face.

CANCER – Jun 22/Jul 22  
Unfortunate financial news may come your way, Cancer. Take the developments in stride and resolve to overcome them. Seek advice on how to do so, if necessary.

LEO – Jul 23/Aug 23  
Leo, there is a strong desire for romance surrounding you. Whether you want to spice up a current relationship or are seeking a new one, this is the week to put out feelers.



VIRGO – Aug 24/Sept 22  
Virgo, enjoy a unique chance to spend quality time with someone you love. Enjoy the experience in the moment and resolve to spend more time together.

LIBRA – Sept 23/Oct 23  
An unexpected meeting with a friend and subsequent conversation could leave you feeling a little shaken, Libra. You will learn things that give you a new perspective.

SCORPIO – Oct 24/Nov 22  
You could experience a desire to make sudden changes to your home life, work situation or even a relationship, Scorpio. Stagnation has set in, but now is not the time for big moves.

SAGITTARIUS – Nov 23/Dec 21  
Sagittarius, if a message arrives from someone who lives far away, you may be prompted to hop in the car or on a plane and visit that person. An impromptu trip could be fun.

CAPRICORN – Dec 22/Jan 20  
Look into all of the facts surrounding an offer to increase your income, Capricorn. It could be too good to be true, or it might be a legitimate deal. You need to sort things out.

AQUARIUS – Jan 21/Feb 18  
Aquarius, this week you may encounter someone who is very interested in you. The resulting attention can be quite flattering. You'll need to decide if it should go further.

PISCES – Feb 19/Mar 20  
Situations that arise this week could have you feeling stressed, Pisces. Find ways you can separate yourself from certain situations that rile you up, even if it means a five-minute break.

FAMOUS BIRTHDAYS

NOVEMBER 26: DJ Khaled, Music Producer (48)  
NOVEMBER 27: Jaleel White, Actor (47)  
NOVEMBER 28: Jon Stewart, Comic/Actor (61)  
NOVEMBER 29: Don Cheadle, Actor (59)  
NOVEMBER 30: Billy Idol, Singer (68)  
DECEMBER 1: Bette Midler, Actress/Singer (78)  
DECEMBER 2: Aaron Rodgers, Athlete (40)

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# Announcements



## In Memory

**ANNETT: Kevin**  
In loving memory of a dear son, brother, and uncle who passed away November 27, 2020.  
*Of all the special gifts of life  
however great or small,  
To have you as our son  
was the greatest gift of all.  
May the winds of love blow softly  
and whisper in your ear  
We love and miss you Kev  
and wish that you were here.  
A silent thought, a secret tear  
keeps your memory ever near.*  
Always remembered and sadly missed by Mum, Dad, Chrissie, Sarah (Ryan), Emily (Allen) and nephews Henry, Charlie, and Ethan.

**Obituary - 150 words - \$50**  
*150-250 words - \$55*  
*250+ words*  
*quote will be provided*  
**In memory: 150 words - \$35**  
*150-250 words - \$45*  
**Funeral, Celebration of Life,  
Card of Thanks, Engagement,  
Birth, Prayer, Birthday - \$35**  
**Wedding - \$55**  
*To add a picture with any of  
the above: \$10 extra*



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# COAST ROUND-UP

COAST ROUND-UP: \$8 per week  
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**COAST ROUND-UP**

**ROSEBRIDGE:**  
**Christmas Carol Service**  
**December 1:** The annual Christmas Carol Service will be held at the Rosebridge United Church beginning at 7 p.m. Please come out and join us for readings, stories, and singing of Christmas Carols. Refreshments will be served after the service. Everyone welcome.

**BARACHOIS:**  
**BADC**  
**December 2:** The 8th annual Christmas Market will be held from 9 a.m. to 12 noon at the Belle Anse School, 1298 Route 132 East, in the basement. There will be over 20 tables of local crafts, baking, knitting, jams, christmas gifts and decorations, and more ! To reserve a table (\$10) contact Sandy Coombs at (581) 887-1417.

**PORT DANIEL:**  
**Three Star  
Golden Age Club**  
**Tuesdays:** Pétanque from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. every Tuesday evening. Cost is \$3.  
**December 2:** Annual Christ-

mas dinner at the club beginning at 5 p.m. Members \$20 and guests \$25. Tickets must be purchased in advance by contacting Margaret Ann Mauger or Landis Assels.

**SHIGAWAKE:**  
**Community Centre**  
**December 4:** Christmas gift bingo beginning at 7 p.m. Can-teen available. Everyone welcome.

**HOPE:**  
**Hope Baptist Church**  
**Sundays:** Sunday School starting at 10 a.m. Worship service beginning at 11 a.m.

**NEW CARLISLE:**  
**Royal Canadian  
Legion Branch #64**  
Please be advised that Legion memberships are available for \$45. Returning and new members welcome.  
**Wednesdays:** Line dancing beginning at 7:30 p.m. \$7 per person.  
**December 1:** Gaspesian Comedy Group beginning at 9 p.m. \$10 per person.  
**December 2:** Gift bingo beginning at 7 p.m.  
**December 4:** Paint and Sip,

supplies included, beginning at 7 p.m. RSVP with Tammy by calling 418-752-8514.  
**December 5:** General meeting at 7 p.m. at 1 Mount Sorrel, New Carlisle.  
**December 9:** Christmas Dance with Tammy Adams. \$10 per person.  
**December 17:** Santa at the Legion beginning at 1 p.m.  
**December 23:** Nash Stanley beginning at 9 p.m. \$10 per person.  
**December 31:** New Year's Eve with DJ Ash.

**NEW CARLISLE:**  
**Bible Chapel  
Meetings**  
**Sundays:** 9:30 a.m. Breaking of Bread for believers. 2 p.m. Gospel meeting and Sunday School.  
**Thursdays:** 7 p.m. Prayer Meeting and Bible Study. Everyone welcome! For more information: 418-752-3372 or 418-752-6011.

**NEW CARLISLE:**  
**Christmas  
Bazaar**  
**December 2:** A Christmas Bazaar will be held at New Carlisle High School from 10

a.m. to 3 p.m. Entry fee \$2 with a chance to win a prize. All proceeds go to the St. Andrew's Anglican Church, New Carlisle. If you would like to rent a table, please contact Agnes Blais on Facebook.

**CASCAPEDIA-ST-JULES:**  
**50+ Club**  
**Tuesdays:** Grocery bingo every Tuesday beginning September 5 at 7 p.m. \$10 for three cards. Extra cards are \$1 each.

**CASCAPEDIA-ST-JULES:**  
**Book Room**  
**Every Wednesday:** The book room is now reopened. Anyone who needs assistance can contact Kathleen at 418-392-4896.

**CASCAPEDIA-ST-JULES:**  
**Christmas Parade**  
Come join the fun and magic as we celebrate the third annual Christmas Parade in Cascapedia-St-Jules. This year's edition takes place on **December 16**. You can register your floats with Lisa Cleary at Lcleary79@gmail.com by **December 8**. There is a \$10 registration fee which can be paid

at the municipal office. Join our facebook page: Cascapedia-St-Jules Recreation for more information as we get closer to the special event.

**UNITED CHURCH  
NEW RICHMOND  
Sunday, December 3**  
10 a.m. Service

**UNITED CHURCH  
HOPE TOWN  
Sunday, December 3**  
10 a.m. Service

**ANGLICAN  
CHURCH  
OF CANADA  
Sunday, December 3**  
**NEW CARLISLE**  
11 a.m. Holy Eucharist  
**HOPE TOWN**  
10 a.m. Morning Prayer  
**PORT DANIEL**  
9 a.m. Holy Eucharist

# Social Notes

CALLING ALL  
COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Social notes can be emailed to:  
specsocialnotes@gmail.com  
or call 418-752-5400

Do you miss reading the **Social Notes** section?  
**If so, you are not alone.**

We would like to bring the **Social Notes** back but in a new and revamped way.  
Easy peasy, you'll be able to submit your own news by email or by calling the office and leaving a message (be sure to include your name and number)

### Examples of Social Notes material

Out-of-town visitors, get well wishes, birthday celebrations, welcoming new neighbours, anniversaries, etc. Just send us your notes and we'll do the rest!



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## STRIKE:

### Cont'd from cover

The addition of the conciliator ensures that things move a little faster and adds seriousness to the table,” mentions Jenny Tardif, the national APTS representative for the Gaspé Peninsula and Magdalen Islands.

She adds that if there is no agreement, the union is ready to go on an unlimited general strike as soon as possible.

During the November 23 midmorning demonstration in Quebec City, Premier François Legault indicated that he was “ready to increase its salary offer to 14.8% if the unions granted more flexibility.”

### The needs are great

“The government is asking for staff flexibility in conventions, but it currently explains why nurses are fighting to have better schedule predictability and to have stability at the level of work teams. His request is completely contrary. I don't know how we are going to move forward. This shows that the government is not listening to health sector people and perhaps not listening to the needs of the population,” says the president of the Eastern Quebec Nurses, Auxiliary Nurses and Respiratory Therapists, Pier-Luc Bujold.

The Gaspé Spec also met teachers and health workers along the picket line. A teacher, participating in the Bonaventure demonstration, voiced frustration over the lack of recognition of her and her colleagues' work.

“I have a master's degree, but I don't have a teaching degree. I have seven different

groups of students, and seven different subjects to prepare, and I am making \$600 per week clear for about 60 hours of work weekly. I would have an easier way of earning a living by taking training for a trade,” she explains, preferring not to identify herself, as she has no permanent status. The 60 hours she mentions in-

cludes time spent doing work from home, that isn't included in her official schedule.

A psychologist who was at one of the demonstrations pointed out that a large proportion of her clientele comes from the education system.

“They are exhausted, on the verge of a burnout. They are under the impression that

they fail the students because a fairly significant proportion of them (students) have special needs. The teachers don't have the resources to succeed in accompanying the students,” she explains.

Despite Premier Legault's statement to the effect that his government is offering a salary increase of up to 14.8%, lead-

ers of the Common Front union argue that the offer presented to them thus far does not exceed 10.3%.

The average earnings of public employees who are members of the Common Front currently stand at \$43,916, reflecting an 11.9% deficit compared to Quebec's average salary.

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Looking forward to seeing you there!



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