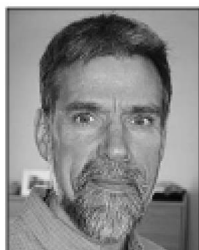




Editorial page



Commentary

Gilles Gagné

We need one minister responsible for our region

Twice over recent weeks, individually and collectively, Gaspé Peninsula and Magdalen Islands Members of the National Assembly Méganne Perry-Mélançon, Sylvain Roy and Joël Arseneau have criticized the lack of presence Marie-Ève Proulx, Quebec government's minister responsible for their region has had in their region.

They have not criticized her personally. They are basically saying that taking care of three regions is too much for a single minister, especially considering that those three regions, Lower Saint Lawrence and Chaudière-Appalaches being the others, are large. They could have added that only one is close to the capital, Quebec City.

They are right. Ms. Proulx is delegate Minister of Regional Economic Development, a department without a portfolio, and she is also responsible for three geographically large regions, with diversified regional issues.

Even if her department is subjected to another ministry, Economy, it remains a large workload. Add to that three regions with priorities that differ quite a bit, and you have a task that is barely feasible.

It would be feasible if those three regions had been well served by the previous Liberal Party government of Philippe Couillard. However, they were highly neglected between April 2014 and October 2018, which leaves them with a lot of catching up to do. Even Premier Couillard himself acknowledged during the last electoral campaign that his party had to do more for the regions. It was too little too late.

Right after the nomination of Ms. Proulx, the Parti

Québécois Members of the National Assembly expressed concern about the relevance of appointing only one minister responsible for the three regions. It was a realistic worry, considering that the three regions are larger than some European countries, that a physical presence is useful to get a good grasp of the stakes and that the responsibilities incumbent on that minister would be very heavy.

The Coalition Avenir Québec government's kick-off in the Gaspé Peninsula was good, with the mid-December \$16.6 million announcement for three airports and \$12.9 million for commercial fisheries.

Since then, it has been very quiet regarding CAQ government's regional announcements, with the possible exception of the \$26 million to fight erosion along Highway 132 on the north side of the Gaspé Peninsula. That development will eventually have a region-wide impact.

In the Bonaventure and Gaspé riding, Marie-Ève Proulx made her first visit at the end of January, three months and a week after her appointment to the Cabinet. We can certainly believe that there is a considerable amount of work involved for a politician without much province-wide experience like her, but 100 days without setting foot in a region you are supposed to represent is a long time.

No wonder why Premier François Legault came at the end of April thinking that announcing another delay of seven years before bringing the train back to Gaspé would be perceived as good news. When you are disconnected to that extent, there is something wrong in the perception of the minister who is supposed to defend the interest of the Gaspé Peninsula. It is either that or Premier Legault has no trust in the messages he receives from Ms. Proulx. One last option is that he has little respect for the intelligence of

Gaspésians, which could be close to the truth.

Mr. Legault tried to make up for his ignorance about the importance of the railway file by committing to the mayor of Gaspé, Daniel Côté that he would meet with regional stakeholders and try to reduce the railway refurbishment period. We were not important enough to have that meeting held before the summer break though. Two months proved not enough.

In the Magdalen Islands, the replacement of the Madeleine, their 38-year-old ferry, has taken a few backward steps and Transport Minister François Bonnardel failed in his commitment to deliver a report on the situation in June.

There are important files waiting to move faster in transportation, health, housing, regional development funding, natural resources and education, to name a few. So far, the region's stakeholders have not been able to get due attention from the CAQ government regarding the importance of those issues.

Does the region need a minister responsible for its files without having to care for two additional regions? Yes, we do.