

The Gaspé **SPEC**



ESTABLISHED • MAY 1975

VOLUME 46 / NO 2, JANUARY 15, 2020

Contract 400119680
\$1.50 (Tax included)

Editorial page



Commentary

Gilles Gagné

Some wishes for the new year

A new year often brings a need to do a wrap up of the year that just ended, as well as the need to predict what could happen in the 12 months to come. So, it's a good opportunity to make some wishes for the people living in a region like the Gaspé Peninsula.

So here are some wishes for 2020, in no particular order. Some of them target geographical areas, while others are directed towards groups of people. Sometimes, they apply to the region as a whole.

For those residing in the Avignon MRC, let's wish for better health care services provided by the Campbellton hospital, especially to the residents of the western portion of the MRC. Campbellton is their designated hospital and the Quebec government pays more than \$10 million annually to the New Brunswick government in order to ensure a good quality service for Gaspésians living between Nouvelle-West and the villages of Matapédia and the Plateaux area. The current situation could also create an opportunity to improve the so-called first line of services, which can temper hospitalization needs when it is done properly.

For the population of the MRC of Bonaventure, we can wish for an acceleration of the repair or reconstruction work on the railway bridges located between Cascapédia-Saint-Jules and New Carlisle. This development, coupled with an accurate evaluation of the repairs that must be carried out on the line between New Carlisle and Gaspé, could spell an earlier than expected return of the VIA Rail passenger

train to New Carlisle. VIA Rail officials have been repeating for years now that the passenger train could return to New Carlisle first. The condition is simple: before any return of VIA Rail east of Matapédia, a date for the return to Gaspé will have to be set. Everybody understands that the line will be ready in New Carlisle before Gaspé. Other conditions imposed by VIA Rail make sense, namely a safe railway and reasonable train speeds, comparable to the ones prevailing 15 years ago, for example. Our economy, our environment and our people need the train back as soon as possible.

For the Percé Rock MRC, we wish an early start to the crab season for fishermen in the Southern Gulf of Saint Lawrence, so to reduce the possible interactions with right whales. The Canadian Coast Guard has failed miserably in fulfilling its commitments in 2018 and 2019 for an early opening of snow crab fishing. The initial call was for the beginning of April. Truth be told, the last few winters have been tough, weather-wise, but the Canadian Coast Guard was ill-equipped for the de-icing operation necessary to open the New Brunswick harbours. New Brunswickers have always lead, number-wise, in the Southern Gulf of Saint Lawrence and they have always convinced Fisheries and Oceans Canada of the relevance of waiting for them before giving the green light to the season. That situation could change in 2020, although nothing is decided yet. It would be a good thing for Gaspésian crab fishermen though, because our harbours are free of ice early, most of the time by the end of March.

For the Côte-de-Gaspé MRC, we can hope for an extension of the Bonaventure MRC wish, an acceleration in the assessment of the work and a start of the railway repairs. It is feasible. The problem so far is the slowness of the Bureau Québécois des infrastructures, the body in charge of the railroad repairs. It is a big machine, moving at a low pace, and characterized by a lot of red tape. Forcing that body to accelerate the march will be a huge test for the Coalition avenir Québec government. It works sometimes in Montreal though so it is possible to move faster here, where the obstacles are

not as numerous.

Regarding the Haute-Gaspésie MRC, we sure hope that the protection of Highway 132 east of Sainte-Anne-des-Monts will also be accelerated. Three years after the devastating storm of December 30, 2016, the residents of that area, and the people passing by there, are still waiting on a plan to upgrade road protection or to move that road in some places.

As mentioned above, some wishes apply to the whole region. We certainly hope that all Gaspésians will realize that our region's Native communities don't need and don't deserve the racist remarks made during a hockey game on January 4. A province-wide movement to counter racism could well start here in that regard.

Meanwhile, Gespeg, Gesgapegiag and Lis-tuguj have progressed quite well in the fields of commercial fisheries and wind energy over the last two decades. Further development in wind energy seems to be blocked by the CAQ government but the Natives are making progress in tourism and forestry. We wish them success in those endeavours.

The region must also convince the CAQ government to take immigration in the Gaspé Peninsula more seriously. Previous governments have often waived that possibility, out of ignorance regarding our capacity of integration. The CAQ has certainly failed in the immigration file since the October 2018 election but members of that government have clued in since the mistakes made over the fall, especially in the Quebec Experience Program. The regional leaders will probably have to often remind the CAQ government that we can be very successful in greeting immigrants and that it is a necessity. We need the economic, cultural and social interactions with newcomers. We were all newcomers at one point.

Wildlife-wise, we wish for a betterment in the caribou situation in the Parc de la Gaspésie and surrounding area. Their number is lower than 100 caribou now and we will eventually be judged by the quality of our efforts to save them.