## Alexis Deschênes adjusts to new role as MP

time with my family, those I

love, and be close to my com-

munity," he explains.

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

GASPÉ - Alexis Deschênes, the Member of Parliament for Gaspésie-Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine-Listuguj, has taken on important responsibilities within the Bloc Québécois caucus.

The leader of the sovereignist party, Yves-François Blanchet, appointed the newly elected Member of Parliament (MP) on April 28 as Deputy House Leader of the Bloc in the House of Commons.

"Taking my first steps in the House of Commons as Deputy House Leader is a highly stimulating challenge and a mark of confidence that I accept with humility and a strong desire to rise to the challenge. In the unique context of a minority government, I will have to be closely involved in parliamentary strategy and use my legal skills to ensure that parliamentary procedure is respected. I will give it my all," stated Mr. Deschênes in a press release on May 7.

He will work alongside Christine Normandin, the Member of Parliament for Saint-Jean, who was named House Leader of the Bloc Québécois.

This appointment is another step taken by the new MP, who must act quickly to set things up in his riding, since Parliament will resume on May 26.

Alexis Deschênes has been working on the ground since May 1, making his first official outing as an MP at the Baiedes-Chaleurs Chamber of Commerce and Industry luncheon.

"There are a lot of new things at the beginning," he said, referring to his first trip to Ottawa for his caucus meeting and the orientation the Bloc Québécois will take at the House of Commons. (We have to) see how we hire, all the administrative details. There will be a significant budget. There



will be locations to rent. That's what's keeping me busy," commented the Bloc member in his first steps as an elected official.

A riding as large as Gaspésie-Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine-Listuguj will require a significant budget to adequately cover the territory of some 24,000 square kilometres. "What I know is that we have an additional budget, and we may also be able to request a small surplus to ensure we have the necessary means to open offices as well distributed as possible throughout the territory and hire a team," emphasized Mr. Deschênes, who wants to interact with voters.

"I'm already receiving requests from people to accompany me," noted the elected official.

Still, sitting in Ottawa for several weeks a year requires a reorganization of his personal life. He is the father of three boys, the oldest has already left home, the second is heading off to CEGEP, and the third is finishing high school.

"It's one of the sacrifices that political life requires. My goal is to return as much as possible. We'll use the means of transportation we have to return on weekends to spend

train would be the best alternative for leaving the riding, from Campbellton to Ottawa. "We can take the train on Sunday evening in Campbellton, and I hope to leave from Carleton and even New Carlisle soon to get to Ottawa the next day. It seems to me to be the most appropriate means of transportation that will allow me to be as efficient as possible, not waste time driving, and be able to work and sleep," says Mr. Deschênes. The use of the passenger train would become a symbol for someone who, even before running for office, was fighting for its return to the Gaspé Peninsula.

At first glance, the VIA Rail

"We need it. It's another tool for our entrepreneurs to get to the city more easily; it increases productivity. It's also an additional tool for seniors to get to the city for medical care, for students, and for people with reduced mobility. Our job is to ensure that VIA Rail resumes this service, and I'll take the next few days to think about a strategy," he said.

Mr. Deschênes has no idea how his first few days in Ottawa will go, but is counting on his 12 years of experience in journalism, including four years at the National Assembly in Quebec City and another 12 years as a lawyer.

"I have no concerns about my ability to get my points across. My priority will be to build relationships with the ministers who are important to the Gaspé and the Magdalen Islands to move these issues forward. I want links with decision-makers for the region to be a winner," says the Bloc Ouébécois MP.