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COMMUNICATION

WINTER 2023

**PARLIAMENTARY  
SESSION REVIEW**

JUNE 2023

## A WAVE OF REFORMS IN SIGHT

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The winter 2023 parliamentary session saw a series of reforms tabled or announced by several ministers. The creation of the *Santé Québec* agency and the *Institut national d'excellence en éducation*, consultations in the field of energy, the review of mining claims - in short, it would seem that all ministries have put their hand to the grindstone in a collective effort for renewal.

Despite all these changes, the hot topic of the day remains Quebec's energy supply. All options are on the table to find the megawatts needed to electrify Quebec. All the promoters of projects requiring energy are wondering whether they will ever see the light of day - except for the battery sector, which has won the heart of Energy Minister Pierre Fitzgibbon.

Finally, this parliamentary session was also marked by a major setback for the CAQ: the abandonment of the third Quebec City link - despite being a key promise during the 2022 elections. The winner of this situation is the PQ, whose voting intentions have risen in the polls. However, the CAQ remains in first place in Quebecers' voting intentions, demonstrating the strength of this party and its leader François Legault.



# VOTING INTENTIONS



36%



22%



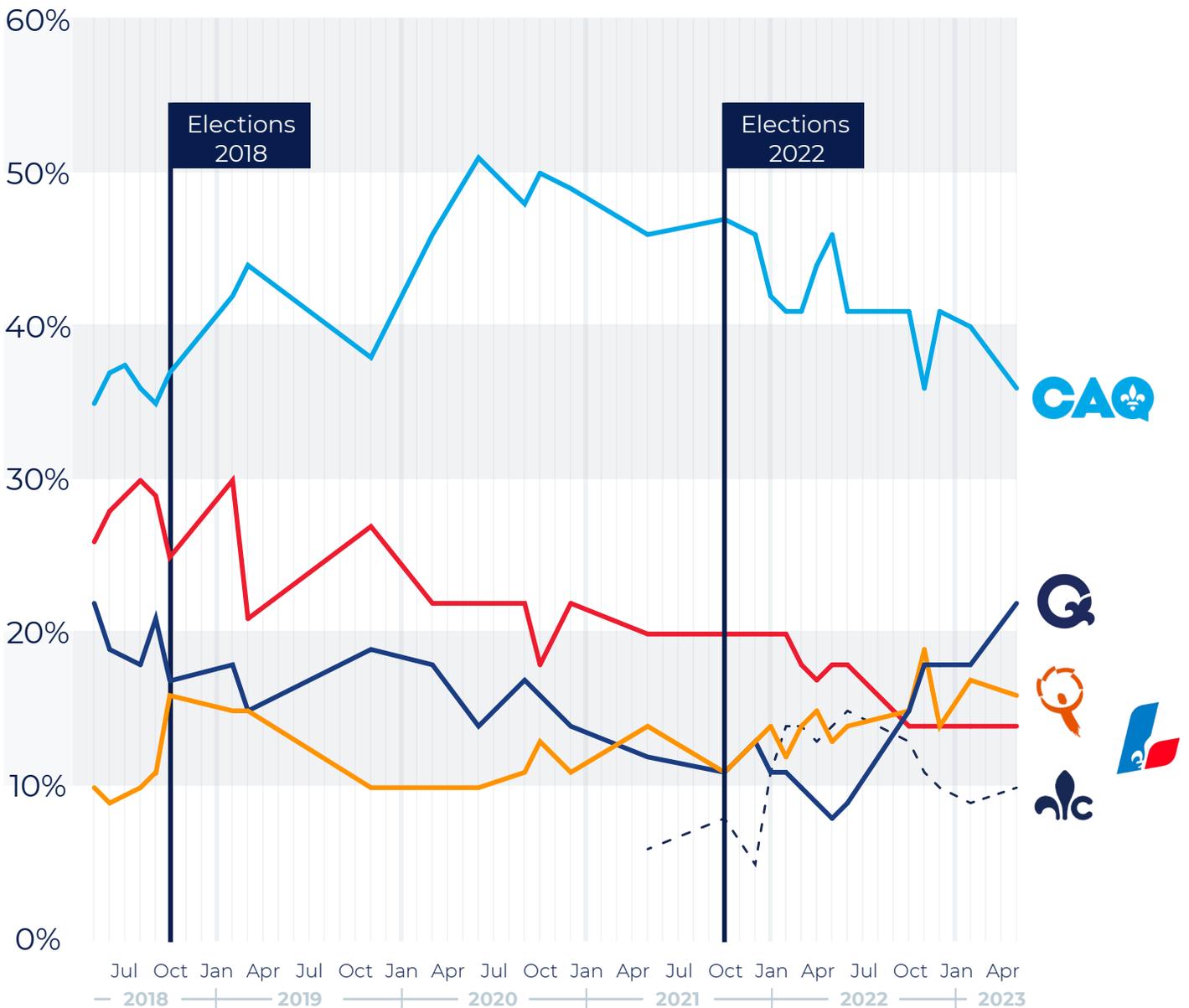
16%



14%



10%



Source : Léger, May, 2023



## THE SESSION IN NUMBERS

### ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

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#### Growth scenario

+0.6%

#### Recession scenario

-0.8%

Expected economic growth in Québec in 2023, according to the March 21, 2023 budget

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115.5 B\$

2023-2024 spending budget

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4.0 B\$

Deficit in 2023-2024

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Return to balanced budget expected in

2027-2028



THE SESSION IN NUMBERS  
**GOVERNMENT BILLS**

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3

**Bills introduced in fall session  
and dealt with in winter**

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21

**Bills introduced  
in winter session**

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18

**Bills passed  
in winter session**



## KEY ISSUES

OF THE WINTER 2023 PARLIAMENTARY SESSION



### GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES



#### HEALTH

With its 300 pages and 1100 articles, the tabling of Bill 15 was a landmark event in the parliamentary session. Following on from the Health Plan presented by Health Minister Christian Dubé last winter, the bill would reform the entire healthcare network, starting with the creation of Santé Québec, an agency responsible for coordinating the operations of the *Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux* (MSSS). The ministry would remain responsible for defining major orientations and planning. Another important aspect of the bill is to improve access to health care and social services, by strengthening collaboration between health professionals and decentralizing management. Unions have greeted the bill with hostility, denouncing the centralization the agency would exert over conditions of practice. Nevertheless, the bill is seen as an opportunity to resolve some major problems in the Quebec healthcare system, such as access to a healthcare professional and the administrative burden.



#### ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

The international race to develop the most intelligent AI, such as ChatGPT released in November 2022, has propelled governments into a race to tame it. Quebec's ambition is to have a dominant position on the international market, as indicated by Economy Minister Pierre Fitzgibbon's \$21 million financial contribution to the Institut québécois d'intelligence artificielle. The moratorium on AI development publicly called for by hundreds of leading names from the technology and scientific communities illustrates the growing concerns about AI governance that are forcing governments to rapidly create a regulatory and ethical framework to avoid any slip-ups.

Canada claims to be providing answers in its Bill C-27. Quebec's expertise in this area was discussed at a non-partisan forum held in Montreal last April, but the need for a public dialogue in parliamentary committee and the legislative issue remains. Quebec's Minister of the Economy and Innovation has confirmed that there will "ultimately" be legislation and intends to rely - among other things - on the Quebec Innovation Council to set up public forums on the issue.



## BATTERY INDUSTRY

The battery industry is THE government's economic dossier, as evidenced by the investment announcements. Over the course of the session, the government has placed the utmost importance on the battery industry and the management of critical and strategic minerals, a decision reflected in its priorities. Strategic partnerships have been developed with companies and organizations to foster innovation, research and development in the battery industry and critical and strategic minerals. Notably, the government recently announced the launch of the Energy Transition Valley, an innovation zone dedicated to accelerating the development of the battery industry and the electrification of transport, decarbonizing the industrial-port sector and optimizing the production and use of green hydrogen in the industrial chain.

Last April, the Ministry of Natural Resources launched consultations to guide policy decisions in this area and review the application of mining claims. This government initiative aims to ensure access to the minerals needed for the battery supply chain. The government is also committed to promoting sustainable development and social responsibility in the exploration, extraction and production of these resources. The main objective is the growth and competitiveness of Quebec's battery industry. The results of the consultations will be used to develop policies and programs that will support the growth and competitiveness of the battery industry and critical and strategic minerals, while ensuring environmental protection and stakeholder participation.



## ENERGY

Pierre Fitzgibbon, Minister of Energy, is clear: the end of electricity surpluses means that choices will have to be made about how to allocate the megawatts (MW) available on the Hydro-Québec grid. Economic projects of more than 5 MW will have to comply with **4**

**evaluation criteria:**

THE POSSIBILITY OF CONNECTION TO THE GRID

THE IMPACT ON THE ECONOMY AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

THE ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL IMPACT

THEIR CONSISTENCY WITH THE GOVERNMENT'S STRATEGIC ORIENTATIONS

The Minister is hoping for changes in consumption habits among the population to reduce pressure on the power grid. The debate will continue this summer, when interested groups will be able to submit briefs on the subject to the government, and then this autumn with the tabling of a bill on the future of clean energy.



## THE ISSUES THAT ARE CAUSING A STIR

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### 3<sup>RD</sup> LINK

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Since 2018, the project to build a highway link between Lévis and Quebec City had been promoted at every opportunity by Premier Legault and his government. The situation was suddenly reversed in April 2023, when Minister Geneviève Guilbault was mandated to announce to the public that the government was abandoning this key commitment in favor of a twin-tube tunnel dedicated exclusively to public transit. The CAQ's change of direction has landed several of the region's MNAs, who had promoted the 3<sup>rd</sup> link during the election campaign, in hot water, including ministers such as Bernard Drainville (Education), Martine

Biron (International Relations) and Éric Caire (Cybersecurity). In short, whatever Mr. Legault may say, this turnabout is a broken promise that plunges the CAQ into perhaps the biggest crisis in its short history. The latest poll results on voting intentions in the Quebec City metropolitan region bear witness to this. Plummeting from 40% to 26%, the CAQ is being outflanked by the Parti Québécois, which has jumped to 28%. It remains to be seen whether Éric Duhaime's Conservatives, whose main supporters are concentrated in the region, will also do well.



## KEY ISSUES

THE ISSUES THAT ARE CAUSING A STIR



### ANNUAL SALARY OF ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES

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On May 11, 2023, Justice Minister Simon Jolin-Barrette tabled Bill 24 to increase the annual salary of elected members of the National Assembly by \$30,000. This increase comes at a time when the government is negotiating with public employees, notably teachers, who have obtained a salary increase of at least 9% over 5 years. Asked about the increases granted to members of parliament and the demands of teachers, the Minister of Education awkwardly criticized the parallel between the two professions. Faced with an outpouring of criticism from parliamentarians and the general public, he apologized a few days later. In fact, a Léger poll showed that 74% of Quebecers were against the \$30,000 annual salary increase for MNAs. Despite the criticism and controversy, the bill was passed this week.



### IMMIGRATION

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The issue of immigration has returned to the political forefront most recently in response to the Century Initiative, which proposed a significant increase in the number of immigrants to Canada, with the aim of reaching a population of 100 million Canadians. After railing against the idea, which would have the effect of burying French-speaking Quebec, the Legault government proposed raising the ceiling to 60,000 new arrivals per year in Quebec. Since taking office, the CAQ government has mentioned its desire for 100% French-speaking immigration several times. In the meantime, Immigration Minister Christine Fréchette wants to introduce French-language proficiency requirements for economic immigrants. Criteria of knowledge will be required, but the government has finally sided with the arguments of the business community, which is grappling with labor shortages. Following numerous missteps and four immigration ministers passing the torch since the CAQ came to power, it seems that immigration is now perceived, even by the CAQ, as a solution to many problems. As we await consultations next fall, one thing is certain: the subject of immigration is not an easy one for the CAQ, except during elections.



## REVIEW OF THE PARTIES



### COALITION AVENIR QUÉBEC

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The saying goes that a second mandate is always more difficult than the first, and this rule holds true for the CAQ, which had a much tougher end to the session than expected. The government has shown great confidence in certain strategic issues, notably energy and healthcare, but the first three months of the year have been marked by a series of missteps that have tarnished the government's image. The SAAQ IT fiasco, the Third Link change of heart and MNA Pierre Dufour's statements on First Nations are just a few examples. In the middle of May, the government's communications and strategy machine got back on track. The appointment of Michael

Sabia as head of Hydro-Québec and Lionel Carmant's work on justice and mental health (P-38) were well received in their respective communities. This seems to have broken the cycle of controversy, and the Caquist troops were able to end the parliamentary session on some high notes: François Bonnardel's adversity in the face of the forest fire crisis and François Legault's excellence in crisis management, the creation of Francisation Québec, the introduction of a bill to combat programmed obsolescence and the announcement of a new mental health project were all relatively well received.



## QUEBEC LIBERAL PARTY

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This parliamentary session has seen some major events for the Quebec Liberal Party, including a future leadership race following the resignation of Dominique Anglade. This topic was on everyone's lips at the party's annual general council at the end of May, but nowhere to be seen on the public stage. The event was the only PLQ highlight of the parliamentary session. It was also marked by nationalist proposals on federal relations, underlining a desire to redefine Quebec's policies within the Canadian federation and causing division among party members. The party also attempted to use its role as official opposition by presenting the CAQ as a «messy» government in the public arena, seeking to weaken its image. Liberal MNAs also supported Bill 24 on the annual remuneration of MNAs, prompting strong reactions from the public. Overall, this parliamentary session was marked by internal movements and discussions on the future direction of the PLQ.



## QUÉBEC SOLIDAIRE

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Québec Solidaire continues to assert itself as a credible opposition to the government, but the departure of Manon Massé as co-spokesperson has attracted more attention than their work in the National Assembly. Being a child of Bill 101, Ruba Ghazal is running for co-leader, announcing her intentions to protect the French language. Second on the list is former candidate Émilise Lessard-Therrien, who will fight for access to public services in the regions. Sherbrooke MNA Christine Labrie is still considering whether she wants to be a candidate or not. The young party seems more concerned with internal issues than its place in the public sphere. Next November, Québec Solidaire activists will have to vote for the party's next co-spokesperson, and a new breath will be given to the left-wing party.



## PARTI QUÉBÉCOIS

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The decline in popularity of the CAQ has greatly benefited the Parti Québécois, particularly in the Quebec City region. With just three MNAs, the party has managed to capture the media's attention with a skilful communications strategy. Led by Paul Saint-Pierre Plamondon, whose reputation is growing throughout the province, the political party combined the short speech periods given to the third opposition group with initiatives in line with their own priorities. The recent headline-grabbing demand for the declassification of the 1995 referendum documents is part of this communications strategy. However, the group still has a long way to go if it is ever to aspire to regain power.



## PARTI CONSERVATEUR DU QUÉBEC

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With the end of the pandemic, the PCQ looked for issues to put forward to stay in the news. Failing to get elected and trying not to fall victim to his low profile, Éric Duhaime opted for a strategy based on the multiplication of citizen petitions. The PCQ has only found the presence of drag queens and the «war on Mother's Day» to generate media attention. More recently, the leader of the Quebec Conservative Party tabled a petition entitled «Protecting our children». It seems that the PCQ has only one thing at its disposal: polemics. Without representation in the National Assembly, the party is losing momentum and will have to find a way to assert itself on other themes if it does not want to continue to see its electoral base dwindle.



# THE MUNICIPAL WORLD INVITES ITSELF AT THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY



## TOURISTIC HOUSING

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In the wake of a fire that claimed seven lives in Old Montreal, including in unlicensed AirBnB rentals, Minister of Tourism Caroline Proulx has tabled a bill proposing amendments that tighten the screws on short-term rental platforms. AirBnB-type platforms will now be responsible for verifying that listings are indeed registered or could potentially face fines of up to \$100,000 per listing. Municipalities and the Quebec government also exchanged views in terms of responsibility for inspecting rental units and their compliance. Each body declared that their inspectors were not responsible for these checks. As a result, AirBnB and similar platforms have now been given the task of verifying that the accommodations and permits listed on their sites are valid and compliant.



## REAL-ESTATE

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### Bill 22 on expropriation

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On May 25th, 2023, the Minister of Transport introduced Bill 22, amending the Expropriation Act to establish a new framework in this area. With the aim of promoting transparency, citizen participation and the protection of property owners' rights, it also emphasizes on the definition of clear criteria for determining compensation paid to property owners, which will no longer correspond to the owner's value, but to its market value combined with the property's potential for use. This proposal raises a number of issues, such as effects on investment and impacts on development projects. However, the Minister also intends to tackle abusive expropriations and proposes remedies for owners who feel like they have been unfairly treated. Finally, it aims to provide greater protection for natural environments and speculative effects. The bill will also address some of the major challenges related to the environment and the housing crisis, notably by providing greater protection for natural environments and by enabling projects in the public interest, such as social housing, schools or public transit, to be carried out more quickly and at lower cost.

# CONCLUSION

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Although the session was slightly less voluminous in terms of legislation passed, several bills were tabled just before the end of the session in anticipation of the fall session. Notably, the long-awaited Bill 31 on housing was tabled on the very last day of the session, much to the disappointment of the opposition, who wanted to be able to pass it before July 1<sup>st</sup>. Other major projects due to continue into September include Bill 29 on programmed obsolescence, Bill 22 on expropriation, and Omnibus No. 30, which amends various provisions, mainly in the financial sector. Finally, the bill that opponents describe as the “legislative mammoth” in terms of health care will continue its detailed studies, and many even question the commission’s ability to succeed in adopting it during the fall session, considering that it has more than 1100 articles and that many amendments are expected. The Prime Minister himself has announced that the autumn session will be “hot”. As such, there’ll be no shortage of work for MNAs in the autumn.



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