

Strategy 338: the Montreal Branch met with the Bloc Québécois MP, Jean-Denis Garon, for the federal riding of Mirabel, as part of the national strategy to defend the interests of Federal Retirees.



On February 19, 2024, as president of the Montreal branch, Jacques Lambert, along with Sylvie d'Alcantara, head of the local advocacy committee, we met with Jean-Denis Garon, the Bloc Québécois MP for the Mirabel riding, in the presence of his political attaché Marc-Olivier Leblanc.

We began by outlining the main priorities of the fundamental mission of Federal Retirees. Then, we discussed the three topics we have prioritized for further discussion: pharmacare, the national seniors' strategy and enhanced retirement income security.

Afterwards, we took the opportunity to exchange views on other points of mutual interest to our members, such as the consultation on the current implementation of pharmacare legislation, the new dental care program, the prevailing housing crisis for seniors, and the pre-budget consultations for the 2024 federal budget. The discussions we had on the eight recommendations from the pre-budget consultation document for the upcoming 2024 federal budget were beneficial, productive, and enriching.

Regarding the new drug plan, MP Garon emphasized the Bloc Québécois' position that this is a provincial jurisdiction, given that it is essentially a public health care plan. In conclusion, he stated that Quebec already has such a plan, and that the budgets allocated to this initiative therefore complement the jurisdictions that are the responsibility of the province of Quebec. MP Garon indicated that Quebec is entitled to full compensation in this regard.

A more elaborate discussion took place about the dental plan for all Canadians and its national implementation. The dental plan is gradually being rolled out to cover the needs of eligible Canadians. However, it appears that there is yet no agreement between the governments of Quebec and Canada to implement such a plan in the province of Quebec, on the pretext that this is a matter of provincial jurisdiction. In fact, Quebec already manages a dental care program, notably for children under ten.

According to MP Garon, what could complicate the situation is that the Quebec dental association is not currently involved in the process of implementing the new Canadian plan. We reminded MP Garon that our association is apolitical and that we do not intervene in any way in federal-provincial discussions.

A brief exchange was held to review the laborious experience of transitioning the Public Service Health Care Plan from Sun Life to Canada Life. We agreed that the transition has been difficult and disappointing for many of our insured members.

Regarding pension plans, we took a few moments to inform the MP of the action taken by our association about the Alberta government's very specific proposal to leave the Canada Pension Plan (CPP), when our official position is to support the full maintenance of the CPP. From the discussions we had, MP Garon was interested in the actions we have taken to inform our members. He has the documentation posted on our website on this subject. As an economist, he was also very interested in viewing the video offered by our colleague Rick Brick on our website entitled "Federal retirees discuss pensions with the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board (CPPIB)". MP Garon stated that this is not yet a bill.

We also briefed MP Garon on what an eventual implementation of a National Seniors Strategy would entail, particularly in terms of protecting the rights of seniors and committing to standards of long-term care.

Indeed, our members would like to see a stronger commitment to older Canadians. We need a guarantee that long-term care standards will be mandatory, not voluntary, so that the possibility of inspection and enforcement can lead to real improvements in quality and accountability. He agrees on the collective principles that our actions dedicate to defending the interests of the elderly.

MP Garon has informed us that the Bloc Québécois has introduced Bill C-319 to establish equity between old age pensions for seniors over 75 and those aged 65 to 74, representing a 10% pension increase for those aged 65 and over.

This initiative is even more welcome in that it comes at a time when inflation persists, and poverty threatens an increasing number of Canadian seniors. On this subject, he consulted the FADOQ association and the Association Québécoise des retraité(e)s des secteurs public et parapublic (AQRP).

In conclusion, we explained to MP Jean-Denis Garon that we wanted to establish a climate of collaboration between our two offices, to encourage the exchange of information and to maintain a follow-up on subjects related to the mission of Federal Retirees.

Jacques Lambert, President

Sylvie d'Alcantara, Chair of Advocacy Committee