

Independents expected to consider new party

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THE GAZETTE

So far, one provincial politician is more or less certain about making the leap – but the number could rise to seven or more.

Now that François Legault has filed the paperwork to transform his Coalition pour l'avenir du Québec into a real political party, eyes are turning to politicians who might want to join.

And why not start with the vast pool of independents in the National Assembly looking for a safer haven before the next election because they know getting re-elected as an independent is almost impossible in Quebec?

With Legault's group riding high in the polls, some are already coming forward.

Top of the list is Deux-Montagnes MNA Benoît Charette, who quit the Parti Québécois caucus last spring after it refused to renounce holding another referendum.

A close friend of Legault – himself a former PQ MNA – Charette said Thursday he wants to complete the current session as an independent. It adjourns for Christmas Dec. 9.

By the time the legislature resumes Feb. 14, Legault will have had time to launch his party – and Charette says he will be ready.

"Yes, it's something I envision,"

he told Radio-Canada Thursday. "And the idea has the support of the voters in my riding of Deux-Montagnes."

Two other independents are ripe for the picking: Marc Picard (Chutes-de-la-Chaudière) and Eric Caire (La Peltrie), both refugees of the Action démocratique du Québec. Four other MNAs who are members of the ADQ might eventually join Legault, leading to the demise of the party led by Gérard Deltell.

The coalition and ADQ share some ideas, but Legault has said he will not start any formal talks until his new party is up and running.

"We always knew the three (Charette, Picard and Caire) wanted to join and eventually, probably, the ADQ would join us," said Legault spokesperson Jean-François Del Torchio.

"There are discussions, which are started, but no formal negotiations."

The advantage for Legault is that seats in the legislature would give him a foothold for the next election.

Legault has ruled out running a candidate in the Dec. 5 by-election in the riding of Bonaventure. Del Torchio said the party cannot be operational in time, meaning it cannot raise the funds to put up a proper fight.

The Liberals and PQ are already in the field campaigning.

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