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Quebec Election

The people of Quebec headed to the polls on October 3 to elect their next provincial government. As expected, the Coalition Avenir Quebec (CAQ) led by Premier François Legault won a resounding victory, with a larger majority of Members of National Assembly (MNAs) than previous elections. The next few weeks and months will be about naming the new Cabinet, appointing staff, setting up offices and determining the priorities and next steps of the re-elected Legault government.

What does this mean for municipalities in Quebec?

- With the Opposition largely fractured and with far fewer seats at the National Assembly than the number of CAQ MNAs, there is no party credibly taking the mantle of "government in waiting". This means that municipalities will continue in their newly-minted role of "unofficial opposition" to the government. They will continue to apply pressure through their direct engagement, via organizations like the Cities Initiative and using the media to ensure that the government helps address issues like the municipal fiscal imbalance and infrastructure funding deficit, among other hot-button issues.

- The CAQ has committed to increasing water royalties for commercial and industrial users and reviewing those every three years. Revenues generated from these increased royalties will in part support the creation of a new $650-million "Blue Fund", which will invest in protecting and restoring waterways and shorelines. An additional $100 million to address shoreline erosion issues. This amount will be in addition to the government's existing $5.6-billion commitment to improve water treatment infrastructure over ten years.

- The CAQ is a pragmatic party that generally responds to public pressure by adjusting its policy and funding priorities. Who knows at this moment if that will change with their strengthened majority, though it would be reasonable to expect that the Legault government will focus on water policy to strengthen its environmental program (and nationalist agenda).

- With water-related issues making headlines (erosion, urban flooding and aging infrastructure), the greatest successes for protecting our waters will come through pressure coming from a diverse coalition that expands beyond just the environmental movement, and rallies business and nationalist interests as well.