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PARLIAMENTARY PRECINCT REDEVELOPMENT - BLOCK 2

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We all know Parliament Hill. The Centre Block with the Peace Tower.

Note: Not the War Tower or the Defence Tower or the National Tower.

The naming of public spaces tells you a great deal about the namers and those who use that name. It was “peace” to commemorate the end of what was called “The Great War”. But a name like that at the centre of our architecture of democracy could only mean that a central hope of Canadians was for peace, not wars of conquest or imperial glory. It couldn’t help but be a message to our imperial, constantly-warring cousins and friends in Britain, France and the United States.

And on either side of this imposing building, two others. Three grand buildings on three sides of an enormous lawn. A lawn where Canadians have gathered for 155 years for formal celebrations of peace or national mourning; to show a willingness to fight if necessary. And perhaps most important - To express their opinions. To support or to protest against governments or policies or wrongdoing in Canada or elsewhere.

We citizens have travelled to Parliament Hill for every reason that captures the national imagination or some part of it. It has been the final destination of virtually every cross-country march; every demand for change.

Sometimes tens of thousands gather. Often it is simply the citizens who come, each day of the year, to visit Parliament Hill. And it should not be understated or ignored that Canadians come in part because these buildings draw us, in and of themselves. They have a mythological quality. They were conceived from the beginning as a place where there was a space for crowds surrounded on three sides by the architectural expression of their democracy.

Like many of you, I have been there on some of those occasions - as a teenager, as a public person, as a citizen.

In most other democracies, such national gatherings do not necessarily take place in front of their legislature, let alone almost surrounded by it. They often take place in other mythological spots - Place de la République, before the Lincoln Memorial, or on Trafalgar Square.

But Parliament Hill captured the national imagination from 1866 on. As did these three buildings.

Technically, they are in a neo-Gothic style. But Canadians don't think of them that way.

Rather, they appear to us as explosions of stone, rising from the edge of the high cliff overlooking the Ottawa River - a wild river pouring out of the north - part of the chain of rivers and lakes which run thousands of kilometres from coast to coast.

Many of you making the decision over which of the six groups will be chosen are gathered in Ottawa, while Canadians all over the country will be able to follow these proceedings - as the Jury sets about doing something we have not done since 1859, when the idea of the Parliament Buildings was launched. Or since 1927 when the Centre Block was rebuilt after a fire destroyed it; its new Peace Tower soaring up as a symbol of the end of war; hopefully of all wars. They were wrong about that, but the Tower remains as an optimistic manifestation of that eternal hope for peace.

And now, some 170 years later, we are coming back to the great project of Parliament Hill. Coming back to complete it. To build the fourth side on Wellington Street. Perhaps most important: to build the fourth side which will face Centre Block and the Peace Tower. Whatever the particular style chosen, this new building will be today's intellectual, emotional and political reflection of the Centre Block, of the House of Commons and the Senate; of our democracy.

This is about much more than the façade. When you go inside the Centre, East and West blocks you are faced by an intensity of democratic, historic and national symbols. Each wall, ceiling and even floor has been conceived to convey meaning. I always notice when I appear before a parliamentary committee that these rooms are constructed to express the dignity and purpose of what goes on there.

The rotunda and Hall of Honour in the Centre Block are the most obvious examples. But this idea of representation and purpose can be found in every corridor, every meeting room in all three Parliament buildings

This is not decoration. It is the meaning of interior architecture. It is not enough to say today that times have changed. That we must be satisfied with austere interior minimalism. What then could such representation look like today? I'm not sure. But this new building must convey in its interior architecture that it is part of Parliament; an interior where the representation of the people takes place.

There is another fascinating element involved: The two Wellington Street facades of this new Parliament Building will sit on either side of a new and large Indigenous Peoples' Space. In and of itself, this physical proximity is an important representation of the Canadian reality. It is also a reminder that this fourth side of Parliament needs to include what was left out in the buildings of the 1860s - the central role of Indigenous peoples in the place we now call Canada.

In other words, what is at stake here is not a building on Wellington. It is the completion of Parliament Square, after 155 years of Confederation, in the context of a far broader understanding of the nature of Canada. It is not a government building or a civil service building. It must be a contemporary expression of the people's parliament. There can be no fifth side. So these four buildings of Parliament Square will be the completed architectural expression of our democracy.

The first three buildings were a remarkable statement of self-confidence by a jumble of half-independent colonies coming together as a nation state. It was a bigger and more dramatic statement than from any other emerging colony from any empire. Or for that matter, more dramatic than the democratic architecture being expressed in most European nation states.

And now, all these years later, we are about to make another architectural statement about our democracy and our country.

As everyone involved knows, there has already been a long process. The formal selection procedure began with a large international jury, mainly Canadians, from architecture and other professions. An international competition. A first round to bring the selection from twelve groups down to six. And now the jury is on the verge of selecting the group which will undertake the project.

In a few moments, you will hear from each of the six finalists about their vision for the architecture of Canadian democracy in the 21st century. But as we all know, the real work will begin once the choice is made. There will be hard decisions ahead. Citizens will come forward with ideas and opinions as the project becomes widely talked about. Brilliant ideas and serious objections may emerge.

My view in all of this is very focused. We are not, as I have said, talking about a government building. We are talking about something which belongs in a different category - the four working

buildings of Parliament. The four living monuments of Canadian democracy. The fourth side of Parliament Square.

This singular category of four buildings automatically shapes expectations in a special way- Forcing all of us and the jury and the competitors to work out the relationship between architecture and the voice of the citizenry.

What does this look like? What does this feel like? How do architecture and democracy fit together in the 21st century in Canada? This is not simply a challenge. It is the purpose of this creative moment.

Miigwech, merci, thank you.