

Debates of the Senate (Hansard)

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The Honourable Noël A. Kinsella, Speaker

QUESTION PERIOD

National Capital Commission

Victoria Island —National Aboriginal Centre

Hon. Mira Spivak: Honourable senators, my question is to the Leader of the Government in the Senate.

On Saturday, June 21, Victoria Island in the Ottawa River will be the site of an annual sacred pipe ceremony to honour the summer solstice, to commemorate this site as the spiritual meeting grounds of the Anicinabe peoples, to celebrate National Aboriginal Day and to light the sacred fire for the gathering of nations.

For four decades, this site at Chaudiere Falls, where Champlain arrived in 1613, has been designated as a site for a National Aboriginal Centre. For almost a decade, Algonquin elder Dr. William Commanda has worked to develop the proposal. It was approved by the NCC in August 2006.

In the wake of the historic apology to Aboriginal peoples, will that apology be followed with support for this indigenous centre?

My further question to the Leader of the Government in the Senate is: What news can she give us about the status of this project? What word can be brought from the government to the sacred pipe ceremony on Saturday?

I further add that this elder, Dr. William Commanda, is 94 years of age.

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government and Secretary of State (Seniors)): Honourable senators, that particular site is stunningly beautiful. It has been used many times by our Aboriginal peoples. On the historic day of the apology, they had a sunrise ceremony, and a group of Aboriginal people used that site as the starting point to make their way up to Parliament Hill.

With regard to the proposal for the Aboriginal centre, I will take the question as notice. I know that the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Chuck Strahl, is keen and engaged in moving many files forward. He sees the day of apology as hope and optimism for the future in moving forward and making concrete differences in the Aboriginal community all over the country.

With regard to the specific site, I am well aware of the NCC's recommendation, and I will take the question as notice.