

NDP MP Paul Dewar's Support of the Vision for the Indigenous Centre at Victoria Island!

This summer, we have a new voice join in support of vision for the Indigenous Centre at Victoria Island, and it comes from the federal government! Paul Dewar is Member of Parliament/Deputé Ottawa Central, NDP Foreign Affairs Critic, and Victoria Island falls under his purview.

We were pleased in November, 2008, when he joined us at the Museum of Civilization to offer birthday greetings to then 95 year old Grandfather William Commanda, and were glad to hear him express support for his big project – but so have many others over the decade.

This time, someone of weight has also already initiated two concrete steps of action to follow up on this expression of support, and we are very grateful!

As it happened, Jack Layton, Leader of the NDP Party and Ms Marie Lemay, CEO of the National Capital Commission, were at Grandfather's birthday party at the same moment and both indicated that his project needed a Champion, and agreed that Paul Dewar might be just the person for the job.

Paul developed his own strategy of action, encouraged as well, we might add, by several members of his constituency, and invited Elder Commanda and Douglas Cardinal, the Indigenous Architect, who developed the conceptual designs for the Indigenous Centre, to a strategic planning meeting in late winter, and thereafter, he issued a statement in Parliament on May 28, 2009.

This, for your information, is the text of Mr. Dewar's statement:

Mr. Speaker, for centuries before de Champlain's arrival, the Chaudière Falls and Victoria Island were a sacred meeting place for indigenous peoples.

The area has been the site of cultural convergence, political evolution, and influential innovation. Today the land sits in the shadow of parliament hill, awaiting the building of a National Aboriginal Centre, envisioned by Elder William Commanda.

The island would host an Aboriginal Centre, a Peace Building Meeting Site, an Eco Park, a research institute, and a Historic Interpretive Centre.

World-renowned Canadian architect, Douglas Cardinal, has captured the land's heritage in a masterpiece.

Mr. Speaker, the government must review its 2004 and 2006 commitments to the materialization of the National Aboriginal Centre.

Let us prepare for a grand opening in June 2013, to showcase and celebrate the heritage of this sacred site on the four hundredth anniversary of de Champlain's arrival.

Monsieur le président, pendant des siècles avant l'arrivée de Champlain, les Chutes de la Chaudière ainsi que l'île Victoria étaient des lieux de rencontres sacrés pour le peuple autochtone.

Cet endroit fût un lieu de convergence des cultures, d'évolution politique et d'innovations importantes.

Aujourd'hui, ce site vit dans l'ombre de la Colline parlementaire dans l'attente de la construction d'un Centre autochtone national, inspiré par la vision de l'Aîné William Commanda.

L'île abriterait un Centre Autochtone, un lieu de rencontre pour la création de la paix, un Éco Parc, un institut de recherche et un Centre d'interprétation de l'histoire.

Douglas Cardinal, un architecte de renommée internationale, est parvenu à saisir dans un chef-d'œuvre la richesse et l'essence de ce site patrimonial.

Monsieur le président, le gouvernement doit revoir ses engagements de 2004-2006 en ce qui concerne la concrétisation de ce Centre autochtone national.

Préparons-nous pour une belle inauguration en juin 2013 qui permettra de mettre en valeur et de célébrer l'héritage de ce site sacré lors du 400^{ième} anniversaire de l'Arrivée de Champlain.

On June 21, National Aboriginal Day, he organized a press conference, following Grandfather's annual Pipe Ceremony at Victoria Island, and issued the following statement:

"Today we are launching a community campaign to gain public support for the building of a national aboriginal centre, here on Victoria Island.

Victoria Island is a sacred land for the Algonquin people. The area has been the site of cultural convergence, political evolution, and influential innovation.

The island now sits in the shadow of Parliament Hill, awaiting the building of a National Aboriginal Centre which was promised by the government before.

The National Aboriginal Centre was envisioned by Algonquin Elder William Commanda. It would host an Aboriginal Centre, a Peace Building Meeting Site, an Eco Park, a think-tank based on traditional ways of gaining knowledge, and a Historic Interpretive Centre.

Douglas Cardinal, the world-renowned architect of the Museum of Civilization, has captured Commanda's vision and the land's heritage in a design masterpiece.

It's time to begin the work.

Everything's ready to begin - we just need the government to refocus on this priority. This community campaign aims at gathering public support for this valuable project.

We will spend the summer months to engage in signing petitions and working through social-networking websites to raise public awareness on the project.

By joining this community campaign, people are urging the government to honour its commitment to the realization of this valuable project. We will take these voices to the government in the fall and request that they immediately begin preparations for the building of the Centre.

I'd like to ask Elder Commanda and Ms. Cardinal to speak a few words about their vision for this land".

Grandfather then shared a few words, and Idoia Cardinal talked a little about her husband's work in his absence.

Thus the media campaign was launched and you can read about it and see the photo clips at www.pauldewar.ca.

Now, let me also add this. Even before he became quite so important to the country, the Honourable Michael Ignatieff came to Victoria Island when Grandfather was presented with the Key to the City of Ottawa by former Mayor Bob Chairelli, drawn there by an certain level of understanding of Indigenous issues and rights, and he wrote spontaneously to congratulate Grandfather on his appointment as Officer of the Order of Canada. Then, just a few weeks ago on June 23, 2009, Chuck Strahl, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Metis and Non-Status Indians, wrote a warm letter of congratulations on the Order of Canada appointment, noting "As the sacred keeper of the Seven Fires Prophecy Belt, the Jay Treaty Border Crossing Belt and the Three Figures Welcoming/Agreement Wampum Belt, you have carried the proud tradition of your people forward, securing future successes through your many activities, such as your involvement as Founder of the Circle of All Nations."

So you see, in his Circle of All Nations way, Grandfather sits in the centre, drawing diverse parties to respect for the core elements of his work and philosophy, and we believe all federal leadership parties can come together to support the amazingly inclusive vision for Victoria Island.

But, MP Paul Dewar's courageous initiative draws to the Indigenous cause a level of media visibility and government attention that is urgently needed, and his effort to mobilize community attention brings us directly to you!

Over the course of the summer, please visit Paul Dewar's Facebook site and send in your messages of support for Grandfather William Commanda's vision for Victoria Island. Urge all your friends to do so too!

And also, as before, we invite all of you, individuals, organizations or governments who over the many years, locally, nationally, internationally, have asked for this special elder's prayers or support in your own work or lives, to reflect on his contributions, and write letters in urgent support of his Vision for the Indigenous Centre on Victoria and for the Sacred Chaudière Site to the Prime Minister of Canada, MP Paul Dewar, your other representatives and leaders, the UN, the Queen, and to William Commanda himself! (pm@pm.gc.ca, DewarP@parl.gc.ca, circleofallnations@sympatico.ca)

Let us make all the efforts to see his vision materialize before he turns 96 on November 11, 2009 - the Day of Remembrance.

And, big thanks to Paul Dewar and his team for their work on this initiative!