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NOTRE DAME CATHEDRAL— CENTRE BLOCK REHABILITATION

Statement by:

The Honourable Patricia Bovey

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Hon. Patricia Bovey: Honourable senators, I comment today on one of the many devastating events of the last several weeks, the catastrophic fire at Notre Dame Cathedral.

First, however, my compassion and condolences go to all the victims of the recent international terrorist crises in churches, synagogues and mosques.

Paris's Notre Dame, as active parish, is an international icon and one of the world's most recognizable and visited heritage sites. We watched in horror as this 850-year-old building burned and the 19th century spire atop its 1163 foundations fell. The cathedral was under renovation at the time. Fortunately, the two north towers, the bells and the three most important rose windows were spared by a mere half hour, but the roof and much else was gone.

Luckily, the roof sculptures were removed the week before the fire and, thanks to the work of responders, much of the art was carried out while the fire raged.

Accolades are due to the firefighters and the way they used the many years of dedicated research on centuries of the building's construction to determine how and where to attack the flames.

In addition to sharing the shock and very real loss felt by Parisians, the French and those around the world, we must ask what we on Parliament Hill can learn from this horror as we commence upgrades to Centre Block.

First, as demonstrated with Notre Dame and recently with the Charles Rennie MacIntosh Glasgow School of Art, heritage buildings — key to understanding our past, our roots and, thus, our futures — are, in fact, in greatest peril during periods of renovation. We must heed that reality and make sure we have ongoing monitoring and surveillance throughout our project.

Second, again demonstrated by Notre Dame, is the importance of removing all the critically important artifacts and architectural embellishments at the outset. Some of ours have been moved. Others, like the war paintings in the Senate Chamber, are in progress. I am eager to learn the processes and timelines for what remains to be removed.

Third, also demonstrated by Notre Dame, was the importance of the detailed records of materials and renderings of the building's structure. I gather we don't have that level of detail for Centre Block's construction, which complicates our project. Appropriate care must be taken to gather the information needed.

Fourth is an emergency disaster plan ready for immediate implementation if needed. I understand such a plan is in place, one, I hope, with multiple alarms and means for action.

Our built heritage is critically important. Centre Block is an architectural gem that embraces our history and dreams and is recognized internationally. Let's ensure its renovation and preservation is done with the utmost of care. As Sir Winston Churchill said:

We shape our buildings and thereafter they shape us.
