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PORTRAIT GALLERY OF CANADA

Statement by:
The Honourable Patricia Bovey

Thursday, June 3, 2021

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Hon. Patricia Bovey: Thank you, Your Honour, and I thank the CSG for giving me this spot. Just a few months after my induction in this august chamber, at my invitation, 85% of you signed a letter supporting the Portrait Gallery of Canada, an initiative that had been in progress, yet stalled several times over many years. I was delighted to join the endeavours of former Senator Grafstein and Senator Joyal and Senator Black, Alberta, to do what I could to support this vision.

Today I am very pleased to report that the Portrait Gallery of Canada is alive, doing well and moving forward.

Lawson Hunter, board chair, provides me with regular updates. They have incorporated and have a CRA charitable number. Their governing board includes members of the visual arts and business. Their larger advisory board is broad; one member is former Senator Charette-Poulin.

Joanne Charette, formerly a National Gallery of Canada senior staff member, has been announced as gallery director. With formal partnerships with the Ottawa Community Foundation and the Royal Academy of Arts, they raised sufficient private sector funds for a feasibility study released 18 months ago — an important milestone and a guide for their ongoing work, policy clarification, program planning and now potential building site assessment. Two virtual exhibitions are in the planning stages. First, national in scope, to be launched this August is curated by

an Ottawa photography curator. The second, scheduled for January 2022, is the work of a Winnipeg Indigenous artist, curated by a western Canadian art gallery's former director. They will make detailed announcements soon.

What defines a portrait and what is this emerging Canadian organization's goal? This gallery is not looking to enshrine past deceased White leaders painted by deceased White artists. It is seeking to celebrate the diversity of all peoples of Canada and of all Canadian artists past and present, Indigenous and of all colours. Likewise they are seeking to explore the many techniques and media artists use to create: paint, print, pencil, clay, cameras, computers, film, video and more. To me their work is exciting, groundbreaking and will certainly engage visitors and audiences as the English, Australian and U.S. portrait galleries do. This group is doing it the Canadian way, with consultation, inclusion, professionalism, engagement and commitment.

Colleagues, you will understand how much I enjoy the regular updates. This important initiative will give all Canadians and visitors a window to our history and our present at a time when the pandemic has demonstrated how important it is that Canada be increasingly self-sufficient, and that we celebrate our nation and the vital part artists play in our self-definition. I commend all involved and Lawson Hunter's leadership. I applaud their accomplishments since I first asked for your support early in 2017. Thank you.
