

SPEAKING NOTES
THE HONOURABLE NOËL A. KINSELLA
SPEAKER OF THE SENATE

ON THE OCCASION OF A RECEPTION CELEBRATING THE 65th
ANNIVERSARY OF THE CANADIAN MUSEUMS ASSOCIATION AND
CANADIAN MUSEUMS DAY

256-S CENTRE BLOCK, OTTAWA
NOVEMBER 27, 2012

Mr. Greenlaw,
Dr. McAvity,
Honourable Senators,
Members of the House of Commons,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to Parliament and to this historic room which was the customary meeting place of the Standing Senate Committee on Banking and Commerce. Although it is a place where serious issues have been and are still regularly discussed, we are gathered here today to celebrate Canadian Museums Day and to mark the 65th anniversary of the formation of the Canadian Museums Association.

The representatives of Canadian museums who are with us today will no doubt have noted that this building has many of the characteristics of a museum. Our Canadian history surrounds us and the observant will note the many artefacts which are to be found in these environs.

Among the functions of our museums is the preservation of our past, but they are far more than mere repositories of information and objects. Museums have a strong educational element to assist both Canadians and visitors to better

understand our predecessors and the challenges they faced. Museums highlight our heritage and our accomplishments. In doing so, they strengthen our sense of national identity.

They are also a source of inspiration. We see what has been done and that leads naturally to the question of what might be done next. Innovation is not far behind.

The Canadian Museum Association numbers among its members operations both small and large. Included are a wide variety of formats from art galleries to aquaria to zoos and even extending to sports halls-of-fame. Nearly 2,000 separate entities are included nationally, but there is no doubt that Ottawa has a large concentration.

It would take a considerable effort to completely avoid museums in this city, and who would want to? The Museum of Civilizations across the river is a magnificent edifice, as is the National Art Gallery. Their collections are astonishing. We have the Museum of Natural History down Metcalfe Street and the Currency Museum of the Bank of Canada just across the way on Sparks Street.

Most cities and many towns have their own museums. My own home city of Fredericton has a number, with the Beaverbrook Art Gallery being a personal favourite.

Museums are particularly attractive to tourists. Visitors from both within Canada and from abroad often make it a point to visit museums when they travel. In doing so, they learn about the mosaic of our nation, gaining a greater understanding of our antecedents. There is also no doubt that both the local and national economy gain significantly from tourism.

Although national museums were traditionally housed here in Ottawa, a new museum was opened in Halifax, Nova Scotia in 2011. Canada is largely a nation of immigrants and the new National Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 helps visitors understand the significance of the people who left their homelands to make new lives in Canada. Pier 21 was famous as a landing point for early arrivals, particularly those coming to Canada from Europe.

Somewhat to the west, the Canadian Museum for Human Rights is in the process of becoming a reality in Winnipeg, Manitoba, with construction nearing completion and a projected opening date in 2014. This project has been many years in the making, and required the participation of all levels of government together with the private sector. It is an extraordinary undertaking.

Everywhere in Canada we see a great appreciation of the importance of museums. While they have a major role in preserving and explaining our history, they also make a significant contribution to the economy. This ranges from bringing in tourists to providing useful summer jobs to students. In brief, Canadians support museums and museums support Canadians.

The Canadian Museums Association was formed 65 years ago. There is no doubt that the prominence of our museums and their development over the years has been assisted by the diligent work of the Association under the guidance of its Presidents, beginning with Dr. Harry McCurry in 1947 and continuing to the present day with Mr. Bill Greenlaw.

In closing, I want to thank museum representatives for joining us today, for reminding us of the importance of museums, and for sharing their views and recommendations with us.