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The Portrait Gallery

Harper must listen to some expert advice

Ottawa -- The federal government is making a colossal cultural and financial mistake by locating the National Portrait Gallery outside the Ottawa-Gatineau region according to a group of labour leaders representing workers of Canada's museum community.

"Museum workers are unanimous: to be viable and to fulfill its cultural mandate, the Portrait Gallery must be located in Ottawa-Gatineau region," said Ed Cashman, the Regional Executive Vice-President for the Public Service Alliance of Canada, the union representing workers in all major federal museum institutions in Canada.

Labour leaders representing museum workers met in Ottawa to discuss the Conservative government's competitive bidding process for the Portrait Gallery. The meeting was attended by employees of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Canadian Museum of Nature, National Museum of Science and Technology and the National Gallery of Canada.)

They indicated that a Portrait Gallery that is not geographically part of the critical mass of the museums in the National Capital Region will not be able to fulfill its national and cultural mandate. They cited as an example of a poorly planned museum the NGC's Shawinigan Place created during former Premier Minister Jean Chrétien's term in office. According to these museum experts, Shawinigan Place is slowly being reduced to the level of regional attraction because it does not have access to the revenue generated by the tourism industry in the National Capital Region.

Library and Archives Canada currently stores in the Ottawa-Gatineau area more than 50,000 articles that constitute the collection of the Portrait Gallery. To have the secure storage facility and the gallery thousand of kilometers apart will create several problems. Both the costs of transportation and the risk of damage to the collection will increase considerably.

These experts also said that if the Portrait Gallery was located away from Ottawa-Gatineau, Canada would become the first country among the G7 not to have such a gallery in its national capital.

For Cashman, the Harper government has no choice at this point but to abandon its plan to locate the Portrait Gallery far from the national capital. "The history in portrait of Canada's leaders and prominent citizens must remain in the country's Parliamentary city," he said. "Museum workers who are experts in the field are adding their voices to the debate; Mr. Harper must heed this advice," he concluded.

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