



# DEBATES OF THE SENATE

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1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT • VOLUME 148 • NUMBER 112

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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA  
Aboriginal Gathering Place

Statement by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Thursday, October 25, 2012

## THE SENATE

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### UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

#### ABORIGINAL GATHERING PLACE

**Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition):** Honourable senators, I rise today to bring to your attention an important initiative being undertaken at the University of Alberta in Edmonton: a campaign to build a dedicated indigenous gathering place on campus. This indigenous gathering place will provide a space for Aboriginal students that supports social and educational activities in an environment that recognizes and celebrates First Nations' culture and history.

A gathering place is an important means of improving the quality of life and the educational experience of Aboriginal students at the University of Alberta. At the same time, the entire university community will benefit from the recognition of Aboriginal traditions as important ways of learning.

For many years, the campaign to raise funds to build this centre has been making slow but steady progress. In 2008, a visioning and programming study laid out a plan for the proposed gathering place. The university's senior administration, including the chancellor and the provost, took part in the study. A desirable location on campus was obtained and a conceptual design was produced by the university's chief architect. In addition, \$400,000 has been secured from the university's Faculties Development Council.

In a remarkable act of generosity, former chancellor Eric Newell and his wife, Kathy, committed a \$1-million personal donation towards the construction. However, the gathering place will cost \$19 million. Thus far, the university's Office of Advancement has been unable to secure funding contributions from the provincial or federal governments.

Our provincial and federal governments are on the record regarding their steadfast support for Aboriginal post-secondary education. The time has come to turn words into action. There is precedent which confirms the positive impacts of gathering places on university campuses. They exist on almost every single post-secondary institution campus in British Columbia — all funded by the provincial government. They can also be found on the campuses of the University of Manitoba, funded by the provincial government; and McGill University, also funded by the provincial government.

The University of Alberta has a significant First Nations student population. Continuing to attract young Aboriginal people is essential to its continued success as a world-class educational institution. Ultimately, we want young Aboriginal people in Alberta to have the knowledge and skills to build great careers. An on-campus indigenous gathering place will be an important part of the university's continuing efforts to meet that objective.

I call on our provincial and federal governments to come to the table and work with the university to make this project a reality.