

June 1, 2009 Parliament, Ottawa

Mr. Speaker Kinsella
Mr. Speaker Milliken
Rt. Hon. Joe Clark
Colleagues, Friends

Je veux exprimer mon appréciation profonde pour ce grand honneur et remercier mes collègues.

It means a great deal to me to be honoured by those with whom I served in Parliament. We have all been through much in the years that I walked the corridors of this magnificent building. Let all of us who are former parliamentarians take a moment of satisfaction in the knowledge that we have contributed to the ongoing story and development of our great nation.

I grew up in Sandy Hill, a district of Ottawa close to Parliament Hill and, as a boy, used to lie in bed at night listening to the reassuring chimes of the Peace Tower clock. Our family was of very modest means, and I am sure the thought of my becoming a Member of Parliament or Senator never occurred to them in the tough economic times of the Great Depression.

With my sister, Marion, who is here today, I used to go for walks on Parliament Hill and we would sit on the benches and talk about the future.

As a student, I would come often to the galleries of the House of Commons and sit, fascinated, listening to the debates of some of the figures who adorn

the walls today. At one time, I aspired to become a member of the Parliamentary Press Gallery. But I went, instead, to the United States as a journalist and grew to love that great country, even as I dissented from some of its policies. I traveled the world and made the amazing discovery that most people in the world are not like me -- white, western, Christian -- and I should do something with my life to try to build true human security for all. I returned to Canada and went west. Seven years after settling in Edmonton, Alberta, I was elected to the House of Commons. I could not believe my good fortune.

Throughout my years in the House of Commons and also in the Senate, I never lost the feeling of awe at being able to walk onto the floor of both Chambers. I think perhaps all parliamentarians at times feel a mixture of joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties. But to be able to participate in the legislative process is a special privilege. I owe a great debt of gratitude to all those in my family, both in the early years and the modern years, who sacrificed for me.

When I took my leave of the House of Commons in 1984, I made what I billed as my “last speech in Parliament.” That turned out to be premature, so when I made my final speech in the Senate in 2004, I said, “this time I really mean it.” Now I am back, not exactly in the Chamber, but

very close to it, and I say definitely, without qualification, “this is my last, final speech in the Parliament Buildings.”

In my years here, I developed a profound political philosophy, which I feel I should share with you: “Get out while the going’s good!”

Mr. Speakers, you will be glad to know that I am resisting the temptation to do a tour d’horizon. I will just say a word.

The prospects for peace in the world took an upward turn with the arrival of Barack Obama in the White House. By peace I do not mean just the absence of war but the fulfillment of the human security agenda. That agenda has four main pillars: development, nuclear disarmament, environmental protection, and the advancement of human rights. In the age of globalization, these elements are all inter-connected. So we need an integrated agenda for peace.

Governments and parliaments are called to “raise their game,” if I may put it that way, to meet the challenges and new threats to security. There are no quick fixes to the complicated set of issues the world community faces. Only diligent, visionary work by all those charged with formulating public policy and laws will see us through.

I am glad my grandchildren are here today. You remind me of the duty of the present generation to protect the planet and all human life for

future generations. Indeed, it is the youth of the world that inspire me to go on. I may be out of the politics of the moment, but I am not out of the politics of life. I'll go on working for nuclear disarmament and peace until God decides otherwise. The words of Isaiah guide me: "*Peace, peace to the far and near, says the Lord, and I will heal them.*"

I wish all my colleagues the best, and I thank you again for this great honour.