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National Post asks +VG to Comment on Parliament Buildings Restoration

Article by Kathryn Blaze Carlson, "Rebuilding Parliament",
National Post Saturday May 15, 2010

A \$769 million price tag for rehabilitation of the West Block has put the complex project under scrutiny by the community, including the Auditor General of Canada. Approximately one third of the cost will be spent on masonry restoration alone.

Kathryn Blaze Carlson points out that the current building complex was constructed in four phases spanning from 1859 to 1961, requiring various approaches and techniques for the restoration work. Repair work dating to the 1960s adds further complication and expense because at the time it was not known that use of cement mortar would cause accelerated decay, nor that asbestos as fire-proofing would cause health and safety issues.

"This place is a big gig--the Parliament Buildings are no small thing," said Paul Sapounzi, partner with The Ventin Group, a Toronto-based architecture firm that has worked on the Queen's Park restoration since the early 1990s. "It involves a lot of manual, highly skilled labour. These skilled people are in very, very high demand, to the point where we're paying a large premium for those kinds of qualified contractors."

While most agree that rehabilitation of the iconic structure is a necessary "cultural imperative", questions surround the hefty price tag. The article points to the Auditor General's repeated warnings and latest report which lists the building in "critical condition" and "at risk of total failure".

The reasons for deterioration point to lack of action. Identified building issues were deferred or ignored. Costs to repair continue to escalate, especially when crisis repair is needed. This is the situation at the West Block.

"You could go another 100 years for a lot less than \$800-million," said Mr. Sapounzi. "You'll never have to spend anywhere near that if you maintain the building over the next few decades."

Mr. Sapounzi said the Ontario Legislature, a similar 19th-century building, has undergone \$100-million in exterior restoration work since the early 1990s. If the maintenance program continues, there will be no need for major renewal in the coming decades, he said.

Article link:

<http://www.nationalpost.com/Rebuilding+Parliament/3030797/story.html>

For more information on the project:

<http://www.parliamenthill.gc.ca> <http://www.parliamenthill.gc.ca>

