

*Citation read on the occasion of the granting of the degree of
Honorary Doctor of Laws to
The Honourable Peter Milliken
by the Senate of the University of Victoria*

June 12, 2013

Mr. Chancellor, I have the honour to introduce Peter Milliken, past Speaker of the House of Commons.

Mr. Milliken's life has now come full circle. With detours to Ottawa, Oxford, Halifax, and Ottawa once again, he has returned to his hometown of Kingston, Ontario. Along the way, he has given extraordinary service to his community and country, making significant contributions as an elected representative and the longest-serving leader in the House of Commons during very challenging times.

Mr. Milliken's list of personal attributes is remarkable in its own right. He showed an early fascination for Hansard, the record of parliament's debates and decisions, both as a teenager and as an undergraduate at Queen's University. Later, at Oxford University, he developed his interest in jurisprudence and rowing. Blessed with a photographic memory, he trained as a lawyer at Dalhousie University and subsequently practiced with a well-known firm in Kingston. He served many institutions in his local community, teaching at the university, serving on hospital, church and symphony boards, and contributing to the local Liberal association. His deep interest in history and his respect for the nation's institutions and traditions, have been complemented by a respect for people of all walks of life. He has had an abiding love of the outdoors and of choral and classical music, and has a fine sense of humour.

Like many extraordinary people, he has made the most of his interests, talents, and values, adroitly bringing them to bear in ever-tougher environments. Mr. Milliken was not simply a witness to critical events, but shaped history during crucial moments in Parliament.

Mr. Milliken first entered politics as a volunteer, assisting the local Liberal party in Kingston, while practicing as a lawyer. In 1988 he successfully stood for nomination as a Liberal candidate for the Kingston and the Islands riding—eventually besting Flora Macdonald, a Minister with the Progressive Conservative government, in the federal election. He was re-elected six times.

Once in the House of Commons, Mr. Milliken took on increasingly important roles and assignments. While in opposition, he served as critic for electoral reform and senior citizens, and as a party whip. After the Liberals formed the government in 1993, he took on roles as the Assistant Party House Leader (House Business), Member of the Standing Committee on House Management, Parliamentary

Secretary to the Government House Leader, Deputy Speaker in 1997, Chairman of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, and Chairman of the Committees of the Whole House.

In 2001 he was elected as Speaker of the House of Commons after five ballots and then became the longest-serving Speaker in the history of our country. He was unanimously re-elected by his colleagues in 2004 and re-elected again in 2006 and 2008, even when the Conservatives had formed the government. Over a decade, he served as Speaker in the House for four Liberal and Conservative governments: three of them were minority governments. In an increasingly fractious environment, where party leaders and whips “played for keeps” ever more, he fostered civility behind the scenes and enjoyed the confidence of his colleagues. That speaks volumes about his acumen, manner, and principle.

One distinguished commentator has observed that Mr. Milliken was often “called on to make rulings on the very rights of Parliament that were carefully watched from around the parliamentary world.” Five times he had to break a tie vote in the House of Commons, more than all other speakers in the history of that institution. He made historic rulings on parliamentary privilege when the Harper government refused to supply records on Afghan detainees in April 2010, and on crime bills and the F-35 fighter jet in March 2011, which led to the fall of the government. It has been said that Mr. Milliken’s record “goes down in history as one of the greatest performances by any Speaker in any free Parliament.” When he retired, he received plaudits from all parties.

Since stepping down as Speaker, Mr. Milliken continues to serve the Liberal Party of Canada, is a fellow and researcher at Queen’s University’s School of Policy Studies, advises the law firm he first practiced with, and enjoys his rustic cabin and canoeing adventures.

Mr. Chancellor, Canada is all the richer for Mr. Milliken’s remarkable and exemplary life. It is my honour to present Peter Andrew Stewart Milliken for the degree of Doctor of Laws, honoris causa.

Written and presented by
Dr. Evert Lindquist
Director and Professor
School of Public Administration
Faculty of Human and Social Development
University of Victoria