

On the occasion of the conferring of
the degree of
Doctor of Laws *honoris causa*
upon

Peter MacKinnon

Mr. Chancellor, it is my honour to present Peter MacKinnon, inspirational leader and tireless advocate for the value of education in our society.

Today, I weave a tapestry of three long-standing elements of our society: our courts of law, parliamentary democracy, and the university. All of these have long traditions, and some common ground. Professor MacKinnon has had considerable experience with all three.

Since the Magna Carta was introduced in 1215, there have been limits on the arbitrary authority of leaders—the parliament acts as a check on the will of the monarch. In a court of law there is a golden thread which runs through the whole system which ensures that the prosecution must prove the guilt of the accused—the legal code proscribes the power of the state. In universities, we are governed by a practice of bicameral, collegial governance which ensures the viability, sustainability, and autonomy of the academy. The President is *primus inter pares*; first among equals. The university is a noble idea. An idea that Peter MacKinnon has dedicated much of his life to maintaining.

The road that has brought him to this stage in his life begins in Prince Edward Island where he was born and had his early education. He received his BA from Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia before moving to Queen's University in Ontario where he obtained his Bachelor of Laws degree. His pursuit of knowledge took him still further west to the University of Saskatchewan for his Master of Laws and to a new home. At the University of Saskatchewan, he was a highly regarded law professor and legal scholar before becoming Dean of Law, Vice-President (Academic) and, finally, President of the University for three terms.

Under his leadership, the university remained true to its local agricultural and veterinary roots but Dr. MacKinnon knew that both the curriculum and research enterprise at the university must cross boundaries to explore and create new knowledge. Of his many successes, two great initiatives are certainly notable: the International Vaccine Centre and the Canadian Light Source (or synchrotron). The Vaccine Centre or InterVac is a facility for research into such diseases as SARS, hepatitis, mad cow disease and others, unhappily, still nascent. The synchrotron is used to study the microstructure and chemical properties of materials and university researchers across Canada will benefit from having access to this state-of-the-art facility. This kind of ground-breaking “big science” came about as a result of Peter MacKinnon's vision but it was his skill for engendering collaboration that was key to building the dynamic and enduring university that is his

presidential legacy.

By example, he has shown that the role of a university extends well beyond the campus. He has

been a member of the Science, Technology and Innovation Council of Canada and of the Prime Minister's Advisory Committee on the Public Service. He was awarded the inaugural Prime Ministers of Canada Fellowship in the area of public policy and Canadian institutions. Made Queens Council in 1990, he was appointed an Officer of the Order of Canada in 2012.

University presidents consult, listen, weigh evidence and balance the interests of an incredibly diverse range of stakeholders: students, community, staff, professors, and government—a democratic process that must be realized within a legal framework, like the institutions of parliament, and the courts which operate for the common good and the common wealth of the citizens. In harnessing and focusing those diverse interests and domains, Peter MacKinnon has shown us that the university is not an intractable Gordian knot but part of an eternal golden braid woven for a great purpose: to educate students and benefit society.

Mr. Chancellor, on behalf of the university and the senate, it is my privilege to present Robert Peter MacKinnon for the degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*.