

Ottawa Roundtable on Civic Engagement:
Opening Address by Patrick Quealey, Canada25 Ottawa Chapter Co-lead
November 5, 2005

- Good morning and thank you all for coming. On behalf of Canada25 I would like to welcome you to our regional roundtable on Civic Engagement.

- Since you've all shown up at 9am on a Saturday you've clearly demonstrated your commitment to civic engagement. Well now that you've done that (and paid your 10 bucks), you can go home.

- However, as much as I'm sure we'd all like to be home sleeping comfortably in our beds we have do work to do today. Work on a topic of the utmost importance for the continuance and betterment of the quality of our communities, and our country.

- Civic Engagement may on the surface appear to be a rather vague an amorphous concept lurking in the recesses of academia. However this is not the case.

- Every day people engage by volunteering to help others; by making their voices and opinions heard through various media -- in print, online, and in person; by participating in the political process; and by helping others around the world.
- These are positive aspects of engagement, and are the topics up for discussion today. However, something that we must also deal with are the many negative aspects of civic engagement.
- We have seen examples of this in Canada by the way interest groups push their agendas with decision makers, agenda's that often have nothing to do with the best interests of Canadians.
- Canada has also seen more extreme examples of engagement through groups like the racist heritage front, the terrorist FLQ, and of course black block anarchists.
- Internationally, we have seen negative civic engagement at work in Rwanda, as the engagement of civilians helped perpetuate a

genocide, and most recently in the suburbs of Paris which burn as we speak.

- Civic engagement, for me, and for most of us, is just the opposite of the negative examples just mentioned.
- It is the collectivity of actions taken by members of society in order to enhance the quality of life in the community.
- Engagement is about taking ownership of the meaningful aspects of your life and not waiting for life to form itself around your worldview. Its about making yourself comfortable where you are by refusing to allow the world to ignore you.
- Such positive engagement on the part of citizens is vital if we are to have a community and a country that is truly world class.
- Positive civic engagement fills the void between the realm of government and the influence of the market. Because this void appears to be growing, positive civic engagement is becoming increasingly important to living well.

- Personally, I am unbelievably lazy – ice cream, beer, couch, hockey, oh hell yes.
- Well that is accurate to a point. You see the only thing I like more than relaxing, is living in a society that takes care of its citizens.
- I like things to work efficiently and effectively and I like to live in a society that respects people, that makes sure people are healthy and that their basic needs are met. I like to live in a society that is innovative and sustainable and that stands for the best qualities humanity has to offer.
- Because this society doesn't quite exist, yet, none of us have the luxury to be lazy.
- In order to have the kind of society where I can be lazy as I want, I've had to put down the ice cream, turn off the TV and get up off the couch. Ironic isn't it?

- I would describe myself as being a fairly active citizen. I help lead the Ottawa Chapter of Canada25 and have participated in the organization for 3 years; I sit as a member of the City of Ottawa's environmental advisory committee where I lead the climate change, and international working groups.
- I'm also currently supervising a student from Carleton University on his senior project and doing my best to set up an environmental endowment for the city separate from the municipal tax base among numerous other things.
- I have also been known to be more informally engaged by solving the world's problems while supporting the brewing industry
- Why do I think promoting positive engagement by citizens is important? Its because positive change only comes about by those who actually engage.

- I see a room and indeed a country full of people who want positive change. Some are already engaged, and some just need a little encouraging.
- It is recommending exactly what form that encouragement should take which is our business today. We have to focus on answering why so many aspects of engagement are positive; what the barriers are to getting the right people involved; and most importantly, what recommendations we can propose, that will remove those barriers and get more people up off the couch.
- We have for too long lived in a society managed by decision makers apathetically content to settle for nothing more than the stagnant results of their predecessor's successes or worse, their failures.
- It is my sincerest hope that we can develop effective policy recommendations to encourage the positive engagement of citizens in their communities and across the country.

- Without positive and widespread engagement by citizens, we are doomed to give ‘those at the table’ a blank cheque in deciding our destiny. I for one am not willing to accept that.
- Today, we look forward to good discussions and innovative recommendations that will help Canada25 develop its national policy report on civic engagement.
- We’ve had a good track record with previous reports in getting our ideas noticed by key decision makers. It is my hope that history will repeat itself now.
- I thank you for your time and look forward to working with you all today.
