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E&OE TRANSCRIPT (Transcript courtesy Office of the Hon Tanya Plibersek.)
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SUBJECT: Powerhouse Museum.



Tanya Plibersek

TANYA PLIBERSEK, DEPUTY LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION:

Well thank you very much for coming this morning. I wanted to come out this morning with Jean-Pierre and Patricia and Grace to say how pleased we were to see yesterday that the State Government is now considering leaving the Powerhouse Museum right here, where it belongs, as well as building a first-class cultural facility for western Sydney. The people who support the Powerhouse Museum have never said that this museum should be at the expense of the people of western Sydney having a cultural institution of their own. We have always said that a growing city like Sydney, that will have millions of new residents over coming decades, and we hope millions of visitors too, can sustain both of these important cultural institutions.

It's mad to think that a city like Paris would close the Louvre to open the Pompidou Centre, or that a city like New York would close the Metropolitan Museum of Art to open the Guggenheim. Global cities like Sydney can certainly sustain more than one cultural institution. We love the Powerhouse being right here in central Sydney, not just because we are residents of central Sydney, but because we know that people come from all over Sydney and right up the north coast, right down to Wollongong, Newcastle, the whole greater metropolitan area, because the Powerhouse is right next door to Central Station. We know people come from all over Sydney and all over New South Wales to visit the Powerhouse. And we also know that international guests love visiting a museum that is so representative of Australian culture, but also so easy to get to because it's in central Sydney.

It is also, I think, really troubling for the residents of greater Sydney to think that this fantastic building, the building itself, would be sold off for the highest

dollar to developers. If you look around this area, you look around Darling Harbour and Ultimo, this is a very densely populated area and we love that, we love living in a densely populated, inner-city area. But part of making this a great city for its residents is having facilities like this that they can visit, not putting a new skyscraper on every spare foot of available land. We don't want to see this collection moved, we don't want to see the museum moved, and we don't want to see this site sold off to the highest bidder. I'll ask Patricia and Jean-Pierre to say a few words, and then Grace.

PATRICIA JOHNSON, SAVE THE POWERHOUSE:



Tanya Plibersek, Patricia Johnson, Jean-Pierre Alexandre

First I'd like to thank Tanya Plibersek for inviting us to say a few words today. The Save the Powerhouse campaign is a community branch of what I call a movement, and this is a very broad movement across NSW and beyond which encompasses the Powerhouse Museum Alliance, and many politicians of different stripes. We support the two goals which Tanya has described, that we want the Powerhouse Museum to stay in Ultimo, to stay and to thrive where it's been here for 30 years. At the same time we completely support Parramatta's right to have its own museum, that reflects its own character, whether this be a museum of immigration, to reflect its unique immigration past, and possibly its unique Aboriginal history. Basically we think it's up to them, it's most important that the community should be consulted about what they want.

For the past two years this has been very frustrating to us because no one appeared to be listening. Now, the change of government has made a change for this campaign. I'd describe our position now as cautiously optimistic. We were very pleased that Premier Berejiklian said very early on in the piece that she would have a consultative government. We are waiting for her to deliver on that. Arts Minister Don Harwin has recently announced that he will be consulting community right across Sydney as to what is required, and Premier Berejiklian has said, has confirmed, that Parramatta will have an iconic world class museum.

We must be satisfied with that for the moment, because we know that this government is waiting on two key things, two key documents – that is the final business case which has been prepared over the past year, which will probably remain confidential but we can always hope that it will be released, and also the report of the upper house inquiry which has conducted very efficiently, and we had six or seven sessions which is very unusual, it's been very rigorous, and we know that the information provided will be very important for this issue. At the

moment we are in watch and see mode. We are not going to relax our efforts at all. But we are quietly optimistic.

JOURNALIST: What are your thoughts on the collection being split or shared between this museum and the one in Parramatta?

JOHNSON: I think that possibly an expert could have a better view on this, but personally we are not at all opposed to sharing. Various options have been proposed and we know the Government is looking at various options, and these do include some kind of sharing or a second campus for the Powerhouse in Parramatta. All those options can be considered, we're not at all opposed to any good practical solution that will give both communities what they want.

GRACE COCHRANE, POWERHOUSE MUSEUM ALLIANCE:



Grace Cochran, Jean-Pierre Alexandre, Tanya Plibersek

I represent another lobby group, the Powerhouse Museum Alliance, which also represents hundreds of people, thousands of people, who are from the museum and applied arts professional world; of people who've worked in museums around the world and certainly in this museum, and all of the stakeholders and various related associations. And we think that the Arts Minister, Don Harwin's decision to extend the time for presenting the business plan and to look at other options is a very good one. We've been lobbying for that for a long time, and we congratulate him and, in fact, I agree with everything that Tanya has said about the issues to do with the proposed move and the other options in Parramatta.

Museums, as so many people have said, aren't trophies or shopping trolleys that can be just picked up and moved somewhere else; they have deep roots in the society and the environment in which they are developed. And that applies both here in Ultimo, with the Powerhouse Museum which has been here for over a hundred years, and also in Parramatta which certainly has some of the most significant old colonial buildings and Aboriginal history in New South Wales. This museum, just walking here today from Central Station, so easy to get to, it's clear that it has a continuing, wonderful association with education and culture in this precinct. I can see students everywhere, the UTS is next door, and there's a whole ring of cultural institutions nearby.

Parramatta has its own significant history and deserves something the same. It's also got a very diverse community and it's interesting to me that of all those major city centres, it seems to be the only one without a major art gallery, and I would have thought that the people of Parramatta would really want to have something they could contribute to in that way.

And city museums and galleries, like the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences and others, can certainly contribute to museums and galleries in Parramatta, as

they do elsewhere, with touring exhibitions and events that they participate in. And there can also be changing sections of the collection on display from time to time.

I think one of the most important things to remember about this museum is that it's distinctive because it's the only one that combines decorative arts and design (historical and contemporary), with science and technology (historical and contemporary), and social history. And these are all continuing histories that it's been working on for a long time. So during the consultation process I think it'll be really important for people associated with that knowledge to be able to contribute to the discussion. I think it's very important to remember that that combination won't work in the same way if the collection is permanently divided up and re-established at large distances from one another. So I'm very supportive of the Minister's decision to do this and I know that he has a great deal of support from so many people who've been arguing for this for well over two years. Thank you.

JOURNALIST: What general feedback have you got from the art community, are they overwhelmingly opposed to this?

COCHRANE: Opposed to the museum moving?

JOURNALIST: Yes to the relocation.

COCHRANE: Utterly and completely, they think it's absolute madness. If you look at the various submissions made to the upper house inquiry, which you can find in Hansard, it is overwhelmingly against it from the local community (represented by such as Patricia and Jean-Pierre here), to professionals around the world who correspond with those in our particular team. We can't talk with the staff because they're not allowed to speak, but anybody in the museum world is very well aware that it's a stupid idea just to pick it up and dump it for the sake of property developers here, because that's what it seems to be. And we don't want to end up with just a framework of old brick buildings here and a token community playground – that's not what we want as the future of this venue in Ultimo.

PLIBERSEK: I'll just finish off by saying that the evidence to the upper house inquiry shows it would cost hundreds of millions of dollars to move this museum. It makes no financial sense and it makes no sense, if we want to have a living city that is a great city for residents to live in and a great city for visitors from all over the world to come to, why would we close this precious museum?

JOURNALIST: What do you think the Government's motive is?

PLIBERSEK: I think they want to flog off the land to developers.

JOURNALIST: Western Sydney businesses have been very pro the relocation to Parramatta, what would you say to them?

PLIBERSEK: I'd say they deserve a museum of their own, an absolutely first-rate museum of their own. And this collection, and the collection of the Australian Museum in College Street, the collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art, the Art Gallery of New South Wales, it's not that we don't have enough things to display. Ninety per cent of their collections are not on display at the moment. We've got plenty of fantastic material to display, we don't have the places to display it. Why not build a beautiful new exhibition space for Parramatta and leave the Powerhouse in Ultimo? **ENDS**