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PRIME MINISTER

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**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
RELOCATION OF COMMENCEMENT COLUMN
CANBERRA - 12 MARCH 1988**

Exactly 75 years ago today, the fifth Prime Minister of Australia, Andrew Fisher - Australia's second Labor Prime Minister - laid one of the three stones set in the base of what was planned to be a monument to the commencement of the national capital.

It is an honour for me to stand here today and, as the counterpart of my distinguished predecessor Andrew Fisher, to play my part in this re-enactment ceremony.

Our presence here today serves as a tribute to those men and women of 1913 who inaugurated the development of our national capital. But we are here not just to commemorate but to celebrate - to celebrate the success of their vision and the vigour of the city they established.

It is hard to imagine what this site would have looked like 75 years ago. Federation was an experiment just 12 years old, and during those years there had been more than enough heated debates about where to site the national capital of the new Australian nation.

The limestone Plains must have seemed remote from the existing centres of civilisation and the participants in this ceremony had in some cases spent days journeying here to this spot, apparently stuck in the middle of the bush.

The hills, trees, and wide open spaces - an emptiness scarcely broken by the few homesteads that had already been built - must have made even the most confident among them slightly uncertain as to whether they were really inaugurating the leading city of the nation.

But today, of course, Canberra is an established city, a magnet for national and international tourists, the headquarters of many national organisations, and, quite simply, one of the most superb urban environments for a quarter of a million residents.

It is highly appropriate that we should be celebrating Canberra's 75th anniversary in the year of our Bicentennial because the way this city has grown in size, stature and style is illustrative of the way our nation has developed. Canberra is the symbol of the success of Federation; a fitting home for the institutions of our democratic life, and an encouragement for our future national growth.

In May we will be opening the latest and in many ways the greatest of Canberra's national buildings - the new Parliament House, in whose shadow we virtually stand.

It was the construction of that magnificent building which created the need for the relocation of the commencement column to this spot.

I believe Andrew Fisher and other participants in this ceremony in 1913 - had they known this site was destined for greater things - would forgive us for correcting their judgement as to the best site for this monument.

So above all, today's ceremony is about vision and confidence in the future.

Australia faces a different range of problems today from those faced by our predecessors - problems relating to changing economic and industrial realities throughout the world - problems of matching needs to resources - and problems of achieving social justice in a changing and more complex world.

But if we can meet those challenges with the vision, confidence, and the spirit with which our forebears created this national capital, we can be sure of success.