



A design for the times

As we approach the centenary of Australia's capital, federal parliamentarians are keen to recognise an important milestone along the way.

One hundred and one years ago two honeymooning American architects heard about a competition which was to change their lives and shape a nation.

Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony entered the design competition for Australia's national capital in 1911 without ever having visited the rolling hills of the sheep-station site.

In 1912 their design was announced as the winning entry ahead of 136 others and May this year marks the 100th anniversary of that announcement. It is a milestone which several members of the House of Representatives would like to see given due recognition.

In a private member's motion in the House, Kevin Andrews (Menzies, Vic) called on the National Capital Authority and the Intergovernmental Working Group for the Centenary of Canberra to work with parliament to arrange an appropriate celebration of the centenary.

"It is appropriate that the Australian parliament recognises and celebrates

the centenary of the city which was designed as its home and which in the decades since has become a thriving, modern symbol of Australia, a location for government, culture and commerce and a home for hundreds of thousands of our fellow citizens," he told the House.

Supporting the motion and describing Canberra as a "truly unique and magnificent capital city", Luke Simpkins (Cowan, WA) said the Griffin design deserves to be recognised in the lead-up to the centenary of Canberra in 2013.

"Given the influence and the importance of the architectural competition and given the fact that we are now moving quickly towards the centenary of Canberra, it seems right and appropriate that as part of that celebration we properly reflect the contribution that Griffin made and the importance of that architectural competition," Mr Simpkins said.

Also supporting the motion, Gai Brodtmann (Canberra, ACT) said Griffin enthusiastically responded to Australia's new and unique democracy which was regarded as a progressive social experiment.

"Griffin wrote that he planned 'an ideal city, a city that meets my idea of a city of the future and a nature and liberty-loving people'. He wanted simplicity, comfort, egalitarianism in architecture and a national capital that would reflect that," Ms Brodtmann said.

With planning underway for the celebration of Canberra's centenary next year, she said 2013 will be an opportunity for everyone to celebrate Australia's history and unity. She also took the opportunity to defend a city which often draws derision from those who live outside of it.

"I have always been a bit baffled about why this city does not generate the same awe as that other national capital, Washington. After all, in the US, a career in the government in Washington is highly coveted, and a life in Washington is also highly coveted," Ms Brodtmann said.

"It is a constant disappointment to all Canberrans that Australians do not connect with their national capital as Americans do with theirs, which is why this motion from a non-Canberran is so welcome." •