

Standing Committee on The Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act

Tuesday, August 25, 1981

Chairman: Dr. Reid

9:30 a.m.

MR CHAIRMAN: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I'd like to welcome the Minister of Education here this morning in front of the committee. I see he's brought two members of his department with him. I think we'll just proceed straightaway. I'll ask the minister to introduce his departmental staff to the committee. Then, if he has any initial statement he wishes to make, he can go straight into that.

MR KING: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. On my left is Dr. Ken Nixon, and on my right Mr. Ron Johnson, both of whom the committee has met on previous occasions in the presentation of information about the heritage learning resources project.

It is with mixed emotions that I report to the committee the conclusion of the Alberta heritage learning resources project. It was excellent in its concept, excellent in its implementation. It is always nice to be able to report that something has been finished on time, according to the outline, and well done. On the other hand, the quality of the project and the positive way in which it has been received by teachers and students throughout the province, as well as by citizens, leaves me very desirous of a similar kind of project, sponsored either directly by the government or by heritage fund money, at some point in the future.

I don't think I need to recall for members of the Assembly the purposes of the project. But I would like to say that of an original budget of \$8,387,000, there was added a supplementary budget of \$1,150,000, and the projected cost of the project over four years was therefore budgeted at \$9,537,000. The project was concluded in its entirety by the end of the last fiscal year; that is, by March 31 of this year. From that budget, \$516,000 remains unexpended.

I have to acknowledge that I was here last year asking for supplementary funds in the amount of \$1,050,000. So the half million that I say remains unexpended is not of the original budget but of the supplemented budget. Nevertheless, over the four-year life of the project, actual expenses exceeded the original budget by 7.5 per cent. Taking into account that this project was the first of its kind in Alberta, taking into account the impact of inflation over that four-year period, and taking into account a decision we made during the life of the project to extend publication and distribution to some non-school facilities -- senior citizens' homes, lodges, prison institutions -- I'm proud of the accomplishment of the people who worked on the project. I think that we as Albertans can be proud of the project itself.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Are there any questions from members of the committee?

MR R SPEAKER: It's with regard to any kind of a follow-up project or evaluation of what is being done with the material, what's happening in the schools, reporting from the teacher. Is someone assigned within the department to do that, or has the minister hired someone to take on that task, say, over the next two, three years?

MR KING: We are concerned about it within the department. An evaluation of the project was done prior to the actual completion of the program that was contracted. So we had the benefit of teacher comments, teachers who had used the material as soon as it was introduced. But obviously, at that point we didn't have the benefit of extended use. We're continuing to receive evaluations in the Department of Education and are tracking the comments and evaluations of classroom teachers. We're also tracking requests for additional copies of the material, which brings us to another point of issue.

The government has published a request for proposal to the Canadian publishing industry. The closing date is August 31. We are inviting requests for proposals from the publishing industry for the publication of the whole project, particularly projects 1, 2, 4.1, and 4.2. As I mentioned a moment ago, the closing date for that is August 31 of this year. I am obviously hopeful that we'll have a good response. We have some reason to be concerned about the impact that interest rates are having on the publishing industry. We may have to consider alternatives after the closing date.

One of the points of interest about the request for proposal -- and I could make a copy of it available to the member, if he wishes -- is that we are offering permission to publish with no levy of fees. We have also requested proposals that would leave with the government of Alberta the negotiation for the reproduction of materials for selected purposes; that is, translation into languages other than English, a Braille production, and conceivably even a tape production. We've invited proposals from companies that would be interested in translating the material into languages other than English. French and Ukrainian come immediately to mind, given certain learning programs in the province.

MR R SPEAKER: The evaluation report that you mentioned earlier: is that available to us as well as the request for proposal?

MR KING: We'll provide a copy of the evaluation report to you. It was done by Dr. David Young. Dr. Nixon will see that you get a copy of the request for proposal and a copy of the evaluation report.

MR SINDLINGER: Mr. King, you've indicated that about \$9 million has been expended on the project. Could you give us an indication of what the per book or per unit cost would be?

MR KING: I can't just offhand. Just one moment.

MR JOHNSON: I think we would have to break that down. There are various types of materials, like books, kits, maps, and the atlas. I think it would be necessary to be comprehensive to break it down into those kinds of units.

MR KING: We apparently accounted in this -- Mr. Johnson may correct me on this -- on the basis of having separated out administration or overhead from the direct costs associated with the production, publication, and distribution of each project. As Mr. Johnson says, I don't think it's possible to give you a

global figure that would be significant. We could give you a unit figure for each project; that is, one unit cost for project 1, another for project 2, 3, 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3. But that would only include direct costs, not the administrative costs of the project.

MR SINDLINGER: Mr. King, could you then undertake to give us a detailed breakdown of the costs by category, as identified by your associate; that is, (1) books, (2) kits, (3) maps, and (4) atlas? And identify the costs that you've broken off for administration and overhead?

MR KING: Attributed cost of administration was, in total, \$483,235.

MR SINDLINGER: Could you give us a rough indication of how many books were printed?

MR KING: Yes, approximately 1.5 million copies in hardcover. Would you like the attributed costs for each of the projects as well?

MR SINDLINGER: Yes, please.

MR KING: The attributed cost for project No. 1 . . .

MR SINDLINGER: Could you also identify what the project is, please?

MR KING: Yes. Project No. 1, books for young readers, \$1,735,669; project No. 2, western Canadian literature, \$1,376,656; project No. 3, Alberta literature, \$487,104; project No. 4.1, the Kanata kits, \$3,153,424; project 4.2, the relief map of Alberta and the junior atlas, \$1,111,328; and project 4.3, the flora and fauna kit, \$674,068.

MR SINDLINGER: Excuse me. What was the last number, please?

MR KING: \$674,068.

The total distribution, which you asked about earlier, was approximately 1.5 million hardcover books and 17,000 learning resources kits.

MR SINDLINGER: Mr. King, if I have these numbers correctly, it seems to me that they add up to more than \$9.5 million. If I could do it roughly, there's about \$11 million.

MR KING: No. I think your addition must be in error, Mr. Sindlinger. The total is \$9,021,486.

MR SINDLINGER: Could you please repeat that?

MR KING: \$9,021,486. The original budget was \$8,387,000, to which was added a supplementary appropriation of \$1,150,000, for a budget, including the supplementary appropriation, of \$9,537,000, and \$9,021,000 was expended.

MR SINDLINGER: If I might beg the indulgence of the committee, Mr. Chairman. I've added those numbers again, and now I get \$12.6 million, which is considerably more than the \$9.5 million that the minister says is there. Perhaps, if you wouldn't mind, Mr. King, could you please reiterate the numbers?

MR KING: The numbers we are adding are: \$483,235 for administration, \$1,735,669 for project 1, \$1,376,656 for project 2, \$487,104 for project 3, \$3,153,424 for project 4.1, \$1,111,328 for project 4.2, and \$674,068 for project 4.3.

MR SINDLINGER: Mr. Chairman, I've been known to be wrong before. There's no doubt about that. But I wonder if we could quickly add those. If you want to round them -- take 17, 13 . . .

MR CHAIRMAN: I was doing it as the minister read them out, and it came to just about \$9 million even, by quick addition.

MR SINDLINGER: Did it?

MR KING: We have three for an excess of \$1 million, we have one which is for \$3 million, and we have three which are for less than \$0.5 million. I'm sorry, two at just under \$0.5 million and one is just over \$0.5 million. Just eyeballing it, I still say that three of us are right.

MR SINDLINGER: That seems to be overwhelming evidence.

Well, in any case, we've got down to 1.5 million hardcover books. Which project did they come from of the 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 that you've identified?

MR KING: Project No. 1 was 12 hardcover books about the history, geography, and natural environment of Alberta and other parts of Canada. Those were for young readers. Project No. 2 was a set of 10 volumes of hardcover books, selected literary works relating to western Canada for junior high school students. Project No. 3 was a 30-volume collection of hardcover books of literature on the history, geography, and people of Alberta. Project No. 4.2 included a junior atlas, which was a hardcover book, as well as the relief map that I'm sure all members have seen. So those were the hardcover books: 1, 2, 3, and 4.2.

MR SINDLINGER: Mr. King, were any of these books or sets of books given to MLAs for personal use or distribution?

MR KING: Yes, they were. Parts of -- that is, one project, either project 1 or project 2, et cetera, was given to each MLA for distribution.

MR SINDLINGER: Mr. King, do you have any record of what the distribution was of those books given to MLAs for personal distribution?

MR KING: I expect that we have. I don't have it here.

MR SINDLINGER: Would you be prepared to give us a list, identifying what the distribution of those books was?

MR KING: Certainly. We're asking now about the distribution only to MLAs? You're not asking about the distribution to Alberta houses, prison institutions, or senior citizens' homes?

MR SINDLINGER: Mr. King, I believe earlier you indicated that there was some non-school distribution. As you've just reiterated, some were given to senior citizens' lodges, and prison institutions. If I understood you correctly, you

said there were some sets or a set given to MLAs for personal distribution. It's simply those sets which were given to the MLAs that I'm interested in. I would like to know if your department had any way of monitoring the distribution of those books subsequent to them being given to the MLAs.

MR KING: I'm sorry, the speaker was off. Could you repeat the last part of the question?

MR SINDLINGER: Yes. I'm interested in only those books which were given to MLAs for personal distribution. I would like to know if your department has monitored their distribution subsequent to them being given to the MLAs so that we can identify which non-school distribution centres they were given to.

MR KING: No, we have not monitored them subsequent to distribution to MLAs. I can say that.

MR SINDLINGER: Was it your undertaking to provide us a list with the distribution subsequent to giving them to the MLAs?

MR KING: I understood that you asked about the distribution to MLAs. I believe we can provide you with that. We cannot provide you with any information about the use to which those books were put subsequently.

MR SINDLINGER: Mr. King, what was the purpose in giving the books to the MLAs?

MR KING: Public relations.

MR SINDLINGER: Public relations for whom?

MR KING: For the project.

MR SINDLINGER: Was it the intention that those books given to the MLAs be passed on to somebody else within the province? Or was it the intention that the books be kept by the MLAs?

MR KING: The intention was that ultimately they would be passed on. I have a set in my office, for example. As long as I am Minister of Education -- or, I might say, as long as I am an MLA -- I will have them in my office for prominent display. I think that is positive to the project.

MR SINDLINGER: Mr. King, I think the widest distribution possible would be beneficial to the project. However, when the books were given to the MLAs, was the ultimate purpose identified for them; that is, you said that ultimately they should be passed on?

MR KING: I can't answer the question.

MR SINDLINGER: Mr. King, is it your department's intention to ask the MLAs to pass these books on ultimately? Or is it intended that the MLAs retain the books for their own personal use?

MR KING: I don't recall what was communicated originally, in part because it was a communication that occurred prior to my being minister.

MR SINDLINGER: Mr. King, could you now state for the committee whether or not it is the intent or the desire of your department to have the MLAs ultimately pass on these books?

MR KING: I'm sorry, I thought I stated that two minutes ago. If you want me to repeat it, yes.

MR SINDLINGER: Would you please, so there's no misunderstanding.

MR KING: Certainly, Mr. Sindlinger. The distribution of the projects to the Members of the Legislative Assembly was meant to facilitate the positive public reception of the project in the province. While the MLAs are MLAs, I leave it at their discretion as to how that can best be accomplished. I expect the books will ultimately be deposited so that they can be enjoyed by as many Albertans as possible.

MR SINDLINGER: Thank you, Mr. King.

MR CHAIRMAN: I would just like to get something into the record as well in view of Mr. Sindlinger's persistence, that it was not a matter of full sets of all the material being given to every MLA; it was samples of the total project only.

MR KING: That's right. I hope I made that point clear, that indeed they got representative productions. They did not get full sets of the project.

MR SINDLINGER: For further clarification, perhaps you could identify specifically what it was the MLAs did receive.

MR KING: No, I'm sorry, I can't at the moment. I have undertaken, I believe, to get that information and provide it to you. I simply cannot recall, at this moment.

MR SINDLINGER: All right, thank you.

MR R CLARK: Mr. Minister, when responding to the question by my colleague from Little Bow, the term "tracking" was used as an indication of what kind of ongoing monitoring was taking place. From a very practical point of view: how is this tracking being done? And, let's say, how would a teacher in the county of Mountain View be affected by this tracking?

MR KING: None of the projects are prescribed learning resources in the Alberta education system, so there is no requirement that any teacher use them. I used the term "tracking" deliberately. Other than the evaluation report, done by Dr. Young, to which I earlier alluded and a copy of which I will provide to you, there has not been a formal evaluation. We don't plan a formal evaluation of the use of the projects in the schools. What we are monitoring is the comment that comes into the department from teachers who are using the books.

That comment can come to us by a variety of courses. Teachers have written to us. They have commented at teacher in-service programs. They have communicated personally with curriculum consultants in the regional offices. They have communicated via the specialist councils of the Alberta Teachers' Association. They have communicated by principals' organizations and by

communication from school boards. What I call "tracking" is simply our monitoring of the kind of information that comes into us upon the initiative of teachers, principals, administrators, or boards.

MR R CLARK: Would I be fair, Mr. Minister, to say that's the same kind of tracking the department does of any other thing the department's involved in?

MR KING: Yes.

MR R CLARK: You're not giving any particular extra attention other than simply if some word comes to the department through one of the organizations that the minister and I are both familiar with? That's what tracking is?

MR KING: Other than the evaluation done by Dr. Young, yes, which is not our practice with respect to many things we do in the department.

MR R SPEAKER: Could the minister indicate generally the kinds of information coming back via these various methods of tracking or from the various community groups? Are there some negatives, or are they all positive?

MR KING: There are some negatives, but the overwhelming majority of responses are very positive. For example, we do know we have received more than 300 letters from senior citizens throughout the province who have had access to these projects in senior citizens' homes or lodges. Their response has been excellent as to the content, as to the quality of production, and as to its readability -- the size of the print of the project. Comments from teachers have been overwhelmingly favorable.

The two criticisms are: first of all, the material has been so extensively used that it has literally worn out more quickly than teachers have experienced in the case of any other learning resources. So they're anxious about replacements -- one reason that we have a high degree of interest in the republication request for proposal. Teachers have often expressed a concern about the rate at which the material is being used up. Initially there was criticism of the relief map. I think it is fair to say that that was because it was a kind of learning resource many teachers weren't used to working with. As information has circulated through the teaching community about some of the imaginative applications of the relief map, sentiment has swung around to a more positive position on the relief map.

MR R SPEAKER: Have we been provided with the information -- I think we have been -- with regard to who did the relief map?

MR KING: The Department of Transportation.

MR CHAIRMAN: Any more questions for the minister?

MR SINDLINGER: Sorry, Mr. Chairman, and I beg the committee's indulgence on this. But the numbers I have here -- and I keep adding this up on the calculator -- read out to me, on this calculator, given my ability to punch the buttons, come out to \$12,919,924. That \$12 million is considerably in excess of the \$9 million the minister gave us in the first place for the total overall budget. It's about 40 per cent more. I'm sorry, but would you please reiterate those numbers for me, or let me read my numbers back to you, just to see if I have them right?

MR KING: Mr. Sindlinger, this is another one of those cases where you are most wrong when you are most convinced. But I'd be pleased to have you read the numbers back to me.

MR SINDLINGER: Thank you very much. The first one was \$1,735,000.

MR KING: That's the second number. In the order in which I read them to you, the first number was \$483,235.

MR SINDLINGER: For administration?

MR KING: For administration.

MR SINDLINGER: The second number was \$1,735,000. The third number was \$1,376,000. The next number was \$4,870,104.

MR KING: The next number was \$487,104. You just lost \$3.5 million.

MR SINDLINGER: Mr. Chairman, I was wrong. I thank you for correcting me.

MR CHAIRMAN: Now that we have the arithmetic right, finally, are there any more questions for the minister regarding the project and its completion?

I'd like to thank the minister and his staff members for appearing, also for the lesson in arithmetic. We'll see what we can do in the recommendations about continuing the value of the project in the future, if it should be done through the Heritage Savings Trust Fund or through some other mechanism.

MR KING: Mr. Chairman, I hope some of the citizens of the province are writing to their MLAs, as well as to the Minister of Education, when they commend the project.

MR CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

The Minister of Advanced Education and Manpower is due here at 10:30. I understand he is going to bring his deputy minister. So what we will do is take a short adjournment and reconvene at 10:30.

The meeting with Mr. King adjourned at 10:15 p.m.