

Standing Committee on Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act

Monday, August 16, 1982

Chairman: Dr. Reid

2:05 p.m.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ladies and gentlemen, the committee can come to order. Before we start into the afternoon's formal meetings with the ministers, I'd like to make some initial comments. First of all, when I received the document from the Member for Calgary Buffalo last week, I didn't read through it, needless to say. It turned out that there are some 294 questions on the list. If one analyses, I think there are in actual fact well over 300, if one goes into the whys, whens, and whats.

The other thing is that I had some concern about some of the questions not being within the parameters of the function of the Auditor General as an officer of the Assembly. On behalf of the committee, I duly made contact with the Auditor General, and my understanding is that he will be dividing the questions into certain categories. Amongst those will be questions that he answered during the course of last week's discussion, a considerable number of which are on the list. Those which are bona fide questions to him which he feels he should answer, he will answer in writing. There are some that he feels he should not answer in writing, because they are not really within the parameters of his function. If that's satisfactory with the committee, we will in due course receive written replies from the Auditor General to those questions which he feels are valid and within his jurisdiction.

Some other questions which I thought were more in the management line may, if appropriate, be asked of the Provincial Treasurer or the ministers concerned when they appear in front of the committee. I thought I should make that clear before the afternoon's proceedings start.

MR. NOTLEY: I just wonder if other members of the committee could be given some indication fairly soon. If there are questions that Mr. Rogers feels are inappropriate, fair enough; but undoubtedly many of them would be appropriate for the ministers. Now if Mr. Rogers is going to answer them, there's no point in our raising them with the ministers. Is there some way you can advise us as to which questions are which, fairly soon, so that we don't get into a situation where we have to recall ministers?

MR. CHAIRMAN: I would suggest that if any member feels that a question on the list submitted by the Member for Calgary Buffalo is a management-type question, they ask it of the minister. Tentatively, Mr. Rogers may be back in front of the committee next week, because the Minister of Tourism and Small Business is not going to be available at the time he's booked for. I hope the Auditor General will be ready by that time, and he thinks he may be. So he may well be in front of the committee again next week, in the time originally allocated to the Minister of Tourism and Small Business. But I suggest that any questions anybody feels are more in the management line be asked of the minister, because Mr. Rogers has not submitted any written answers to me yet.

MR. SINDLINGER: Mr. Chairman, I think the approach you've just outlined is very reasonable. I did not expect the Auditor General to undertake answers which weren't in his sphere of influence. Also some were already answered. I'm just looking forward to the responses we get. I have a large number of

questions for one of the other ministers too. Given the reasonable approach we've taken here, I'd like to take the same with the other minister who I've prepared a similar number of questions for -- not a similar number, but at least a large number.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right. The other thing is that this afternoon the scheduling for the Minister of Education and the Minister responsible for Workers' Health, Safety and Compensation may be a little excessive. I have tentatively scheduled with the Minister of Recreation and Parks that he have his people available so that we can get to the third minister this afternoon, if events transpire that way.

Now I'd like to welcome the Minister of Education in front of the committee. I see he hasn't anybody with him, so no introductions are necessary. If the minister has any initial remarks to make regarding the Heritage Learning Resources Project or anything to do with it, I'd welcome them at this time. Then we'll turn it over to the committee in the usual way.

MR. KING: Thank you very much. Mr. Chairman, gentlemen, and madam secretary, I'm pleased to be here this afternoon. As the chairman has indicated, I suspect that my time with you may be brief, because the Alberta Heritage Learning Resources Project was actually wound up in the 1980-81 fiscal year. No expenditures were made, related to this project, in the last fiscal year, the one under review by the committee, although some payments were made in the last fiscal year in respect of work which had been completed prior to March 31, 1981.

The only thing I might add to comments made last August 25 is that in the year since that time, we have had greater opportunity to receive feedback from teachers and administrators throughout the province. As well, we conducted a major in-service project to acquaint Social Studies teachers in the province with the new Social Studies curriculum. Part of that included additional in-service of the material of the Alberta Heritage Learning Resources Project. Without going into detail, although I could upon request, I can say that the positive responses I reported to you last summer have been repeated in the year since then. Particularly we find evidence of greater and better use of the materials as the result of the Social Studies in-service.

One other thing was mentioned last August as prospective. We were interested in negotiating with publishers to republish some of the material of the Alberta Heritage Learning Resources Project and, indeed, two such contracts have subsequently been signed and two parts of the projects are being republished at this time. We expect them to be well received. We hope that if they are well received, they will lead to other publishers making the decision to republish other portions of the project.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

MR. NOTLEY: Mr. Chairman, Mr. King, you indicated that there'd been an in-service program for Social Studies teachers and that the department had received some feedback from teachers on the series. I wonder perhaps if you could be a little more specific in terms of the mechanism for the feedback. Was any specific survey undertaken by the department or was it the kind of response where individuals on their own volition would indicate their views on the series?

MR. KING: It has been both. Other than the structured evaluation done under the direction of Dr. David Young, which I reported on to the committee last year and the year before, there has not been any other structured evaluation

of the way teachers or students have received the project. But at in-service activities, we have solicited response to the project, and we have also received unsolicited responses. I can give you a brief comment on our interpretation of these responses for each project, if you're interested.

For Project No. 1, stock is exhausted. There are no books of the project available. Use has increased in the last year or year and a half in conjunction with the Social Studies in-service and also in conjunction with some special education development work that has been done by the province. Our interpretation is that this series has been highly regarded by teachers.

Project No. 2, Western Canadian Literature for Youth, has been used somewhat sparingly, not as extensively as we had anticipated or hoped, as a supplementary resource in English Language Arts at the junior high school level and in the general diploma stream at the high school level. We're seeking to encourage more use of it, but it has not been used to the extent that we would have anticipated.

Project No. 3, Alberta Literature for Senior Citizens and Adults, is essentially being used as a library resource rather than in the classroom and is being used in senior high school English programs. This series was distributed outside the school to community libraries, senior citizens' homes, and penal institutions, and we've had extremely enthusiastic response from community users.

Project No. 4(1), Kanata Kits: no stock is available. It's been used perhaps most extensively of all projects in Social Studies. It's highly regarded by teachers. Project No. 4(2), Junior Atlas of Alberta: no stock is available. It's being used as a reference. It was well received by teachers but, in our judgment, they're not taking the initiative in using it to the fullest possible extent. We hope improved use of the atlas will result from the Social Studies in-service of last year. The relief model of Alberta: no stock is available. In terms of use, it has probably been the most disappointing to us. Some teachers have used it very imaginatively, but a lot of others are underutilizing it because they consider it to be cumbersome.

Project No. 4(3), Flora and Fauna Kits of Alberta, are being used to a limited extent. We find that our biggest problem with them is awareness. When teachers are aware of what's in them, they're being used extensively and well. But they are not a project that teachers place a high priority on in terms of going to on their own initiative.

MR. NOTLEY: Can you tell me, Mr. King, as a result of the in-service programs and the discussion with teachers, whether there will be any orders for more editions where we've run out of stock and, secondly, whether there's been any feedback from teachers as to other areas we should be looking forward to funding from the trust fund for heritage series in the future?

MR. KING: As I said, we have signed contracts for the republication of two of the projects. Before making any decision about more extensive republication rights, we want to see how these are actually received by school boards. It's one thing for teachers to say they would like to have them; it is another thing for boards to purchase them, even at the reduced price that will be available as a result of the republication contract. But the department is certainly interested in republishing them. New schools have opened throughout the province, and these resources are not available to them. We also find that some of them enjoy a shorter shelf life than other learning resources. That's not a reflection on the quality of the production but on the fact that they're being very extensively used.

So we are certainly interested in republication, but we won't make a decision on that until the two in process of republication are completed and available.

Partly in response to inquiries from teachers and the general public, we have developed a project that suggests a comparable project in the language, performing, and fine arts, and one in the maths and sciences. We treat those as being two separate but comparable projects. In addition to that, members may recall that two years ago, I came requesting a supplementary budget for this project and that part of that was used to increase the translation of books in the Heritage Learning Resources Project. We are interested in that as well. Particularly we have 12-year immersion programs for the French language. We're currently working with a nine-year immersion program for Ukrainian, and are extending it to 12 years. Especially with respect to Ukrainian immersion programs and French immersion programs, there's an ongoing need for good-quality learning materials. We would like to translate more of these into French and Ukrainian, if the resources were available.

MR. NOTLEY: Okay.

MR. D. ANDERSON: We appreciate the outline the minister gave us with respect to utilization of the resources in the schools. Mr. Minister, do you have any such evaluation of the utilization in other institutions: senior citizens' homes, correctional centres, et cetera?

MR. KING: No, we haven't gone to the other institutions. We have received unsolicited comment from these institutions and, as I mentioned a moment ago, it's been very positive. We have not gone to them.

MR. D. ANDERSON: Positive without exception?

MR. KING: I can't say that. To the best of my recollection, it has been. But if you're asking me that particular question, Mr. Anderson, I'd have to check.

MR. D. ANDERSON: Could I ask if there have been further requests from other institutions for such material, and to what extent these sets are still available to institutions outside the educational system?

MR. KING: They are no longer available to institutions outside the educational system. A couple of these projects are completely out of stock, and Project 3, Literature for Senior Students and Adults, is scarce enough that we are limiting its distribution to new high schools as they are built.

MR. D. ANDERSON: With respect to the requests for them from institutions, requests in addition to those you already responded to?

MR. KING: No, not recently. That may be because when one institution discovers that we have said no to a similar neighboring institution, they don't ask.

MR. D. ANDERSON: Mr. Minister, you indicated that the responses to the project were, if not entirely, almost entirely positive. Can you quantify that? Have you any rough numbers in terms of unsolicited mail responding to that project?

MR. KING: I do have it, but I don't have it with me. I'm sorry. I can provide that.

MR. D. ANDERSON: Thank you.

MR. ISLEY: Mr. Chairman, I have two questions to the hon. minister. They've both been partially touched on. I take it from your comments that where

there's no stock in some of the projects under these learning resources, new schools will not get a total kit as schools have done in the past.

MR. KING: That's right.

MR. ISLEY: Has any consideration been given to reprinting those that are out of stock so that we could supply them in new schools?

MR. KING: Yes. The member asks a very good question. I indicated earlier that we have signed two contracts for republication. This makes additional copies of the material available at no cost to the Department of Education. The publisher is publishing in the expectation that he will sell. If that is successful, it is certainly a route we will pursue with other parts of the project.

Of course, the alternative would be to budget additional money for republication, either from the General Revenue Fund to the operating budget of the Department of Education or via the Heritage Savings Trust Fund. On one hand, if the committee chose to consider or recommend that, I would have to say I would be gratified. On the other hand, as a minister I appreciate, as you do, the economic circumstances we're facing at the present time. We would like to provide more of the books; if we can do it by republication commercially, we will. I'd certainly welcome the committee's consideration of an extension of the project.

I say the same thing about translation. We would like to translate the books into French and Ukrainian within the Department of Education. We make a decision about that in light of other priorities we have for education as well. But we're now building schools, and I suspect you'll have a couple of them in your constituency which will not be getting the materials of this project, because they're no longer available in stock.

MR. ISLEY: The other thing I wanted to follow up on was the translation into French and Ukrainian, Mr. Chairman. I believe you mentioned that two years ago you had a request before this committee for a supplementary budget to do that.

MR. KING: No. We developed one, but it did not come to this committee, for a variety of reasons. In recognition of the economic circumstances, it is not one I would advance now. But on the other hand, if the committee had a different view of the economic circumstances, I'd be pleased to respond to its initiative.

MR. ISLEY: Do you recall the number of dollars involved to do the translations?

MR. KING: It was in the order of \$3 million. I'd be pleased to provide that information to you.

MR. ISLEY: I'd appreciate it. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: As always, the minister is a diplomat.

MR. R. SPEAKER: Mr. Chairman, I believe Mr. King just covered the answer to the first question. The project has come in within budget. Was it under budget, over budget, or where do we stand?

MR. KING: Members will recall that it was originally budgeted for \$8,387,000. A supplementary budget of \$1,150,000 was voted by this committee, for a grand

total of \$9,537,000. In the final analysis, we were underexpended by \$516,000 on that total budget including the supplementary vote. The final expense was somewhat greater than the original vote but was less than the original and supplementary vote together.

MR. R. SPEAKER: One of the questions raised in terms of some of the material sent into the schools relates to your own comment, Mr. King, about values in the school system. Was there any assessment of the material in terms of the kinds of values the material may generate in the school system, attitudes it creates? Was there any assessment in terms of that?

MR. KING: Yes, a pretty exhaustive process was gone through to evaluate the material prior to production. That process included classroom teachers as well as members of the academic community. It also included lay representatives of the public at large. I can't describe that process to you in detail. I'm sorry I don't have that information here. If you're interested, I could provide the information to you.

MR. R. SPEAKER: Was there any direction from the minister's office, the minister's committee, or group with regard to values being of a certain kind, or any direction from the government proper relative to the values in the books? Let's be very honest. Hopefully, we have a small "c" Conservative government in Alberta. Would they in turn say, look, I think the literature should be slanted in that direction?

MR. KING: It is certainly true that we have a small "c" Conservative government with a social conscience; one might almost say, a social conservative government. We have to distinguish what might be meant by the term "direction". We appointed a board of directors and an advisory committee. The list of each has been tabled with the members of this committee on other occasions. They were eminent and well-qualified Albertans. In the likes of the Hon. Dr. Grant MacEwan and Hugh Dempsey, who is the curator of the Glenbow-Alberta foundation, I believe they were representative of the values of this community.

Having appointed those two committees, the actual development of the project was left in their charge. While the kind of direction you are alluding to would have occurred under my predecessor, Mr. Koziak, if it had occurred at all, I think I can say with confidence that it did not occur. The government had no interest in giving any kind of partisan political direction to the producers of the project, something I can see by the expression on your face that you recognize.

MR. R. SPEAKER: Mr. Chairman, has the minister had any letters of concern or informal contacts that have indicated concern with regard to the values that seem to emanate from some of the documents?

MR. KING: None that I can recall. The closest thing to that was an expression we received from one superintendent in the province in the fall of 1980, I believe, who was very concerned that in one of the books there was a full-page picture of the Rt. Hon. Joe Clark and not a full-page picture of the Rt. Hon. Pierre Elliott Trudeau. When the man made his complaint, Mr. Trudeau was again Prime Minister of Canada. But at the time the book went to the printers, Mr. Clark was the Prime Minister of Canada. And since we all know the exigencies of politics, I'm afraid there was nothing you could do about that kind of situation. I do recall that complaint. It's the closest thing I can recall to the concern you are alluding to, and I cannot recollect having

received any other written or verbal communication expressing concern about the values in the books.

MR. R. SPEAKER: Mr. Chairman, on the topic of translation the minister indicated that the two languages in which we have translated some of the materials are Ukrainian and French. Has consideration been given to other languages? For example, we teach German in the school systems. Have there been requests for that, and is the reason the translation has not occurred basically the lack of funds to do that? Is there a request or demand for it at the present time?

MR. KING: Again, I can't recall that there has been any request to translate the material into languages other than French or Ukrainian. There may have been. I'm sure the German community, for example, recognizing that it is a good project, would have an interest in having it translated into German. But as I said, within the department we establish our priorities for translation on the basis of the number of students in immersion programs and the number of years through which the immersion program is offered. Because only French and Ukrainian are currently nine-year immersion programs, they receive an emphasis in the translation of materials. The secondary emphasis then goes to the languages offering six-year or three-year programs. We have exactly the same situation in northern Alberta, particularly with respect to the Cree language, because we are very interested in translating more learning resources into Cree. We use a different approach in northern Alberta, because there we're using adults to create original learning materials in Cree.

MR. MUSGREAVE: Mr. Minister, one of the difficulties this committee faces -- and I've been on it right from the start -- is what kinds of recommendations should we be making to you on how the fund should be spent. Listening to the discussions here this afternoon, one concern I have is where we as a nation are going and what you are doing to focus onto our national identity, whatever it may be. I know it's very interesting to be learning all these other languages. But I understand that after the spending of hundreds of millions of dollars, the bilingualism program in Ottawa is not functioning as well as it should.

My question to you is: would you look favorably on a recommendation from this committee that perhaps you should be coming up with some sort of learning project that would stimulate nationalism, if you want to call it that, or stimulate interest in our country within our young people as Canadians?

MR. KING: I would be interested in that. You allow me to make a few comments here. The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, has taken the position that the federal government's bilingualism program is failing, and doomed to failure, because it starts by dealing with adults and because it relates the program to employment in a coercive rather than a constructive way. The ministers have always, at least since 1972, advocated what is called the youth option. Today is 1982. If the federal government had put a fraction of the money into youth programs in the school system, in addition to the small amount of money they are providing, in 1982 we would have almost graduated a generation of children from that system and would be bringing to adulthood young people who might be functionally bilingual.

So as far as we're concerned, the federal government has wasted money and will continue to waste money as long as it spends it on the adult program they have. As you know, in this province we prefer incentives and opportunities rather than coercion. In this province, no one is obliged to take an immersion program in any language.

So far as encouraging a sense of self and of what it means to be an Albertan, and a sense of what it means to be a Canadian, I would like to see us always doing more of that in the school system. If this committee or anybody else has recommendations to make in that regard, I'll be glad to receive them. I'll applaud them and will implement them. I would make the caveat that the Greeks said, know thyself. I think the reason you want to know yourself is so you can relate to others in a constructive way. The future of Albertans is going to lie in international trade. It's going to lie in doing business in Indonesia, South America, North Africa, the Middle East, and the North Sea. We want our children to understand their roots, to understand where they have come from, so that when they are in any other place in the world, they can be absolutely self-confident.

MR. ISLEY: Mr. Chairman, to the minister, on a different subject. A report entitled Natives in the Curriculum was recently released. Has Alberta Education taken any action on that report, or is any action being contemplated?

MR. KING: Yes, we've taken some action and more is being contemplated. First of all, while I am jumping the gun on the department, since the question is asked I can advise that I have asked Mr. Ron Scrimshaw and he has accepted the appointment as chairman of the curriculum policy committee of the Department of Education, which I consider to be the most important committee advising the Minister of Education. This committee has oversight of the development and implementation of all curricula in the province. While it is not the reason for his appointment, it is pertinent to note that Mr. Scrimshaw is Metis and understands, from his personal experience, some of the issues discussed in this report as well as some of the complexities of dealing with them in the educational system.

We have also restructured a committee that formerly advised the Minister of Advanced Education and Manpower on matters of postsecondary education. As well, it now advises the Minister of Education on matters of primary and secondary education -- the Minister's Advisory Committee on Native People's Education. We have taken the report you mentioned, and its contents, as well as curricula materials, are under review at the present time in the Department of Education. Commencing this fall, we expect to implement some of the recommendations of the report.

MR. ISLEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are there any more questions from members of the committee for the minister? It looks like we're finished.

Thank you very much, Mr. Minister. There were some interesting comments regarding where we might be going in the future.

MR. KING: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to the members of the committee.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I have a note about an urgent phone call. Before we go on to the Minister responsible for Workers' Health, Safety and Compensation, perhaps we'll take a five-minute adjournment and start again at a quarter to three.

The meeting recessed at 2:35 p.m.