

Library Funding Announcement

Edmonton, Alberta

Thursday, April 16, 2009

Check against delivery

Thank you Premier Stelmach, and thank you Linda.

It's always a pleasure for me to go to a library – it's one of my favourite places.

As you likely know, I am passionate about libraries, and hold a very special place for them.

I am truly honoured to be here today.

This past year, my family was blessed with two beautiful grandchildren.

I'm proud to say, that they both already have their own library cards.

I can't wait to watch their relationships with libraries grow and to see how libraries will evolve in their lifetimes.

Libraries are an essential component to Alberta's strong communities.

Our province has some of the finest libraries in North America, built on a partnership between municipalities, regional library systems, local libraries, and the provincial government.

Our library network is vibrant, energetic, innovative, and creative.

Libraries provide valuable services to many different individuals and groups in our society from children to seniors and from new Canadians to community organizations.

The Government of Alberta is doing more to strengthen our partnership and assist libraries to reach their unlimited potential.

We want to be a strong partner with Alberta's library network.

The building blocks are already in place to create one of the best systems in the world.

Libraries today are so much more than the books on the shelves.

Libraries inspire us to learn, they challenge us to explore, and they allow us to dream.

They provide new Canadians with a sense of belonging and a trusted place they can go for information.

They promote literacy for people of all ages and expose Albertans to unlimited opportunities.

Last August, my ministry established an MLA Committee on the Future of Public Library Service.

This Committee included my colleagues, MLA Jeff Johnson who chaired the Committee, as well as MLAs Fred Horne and Teresa Woo-Paw.

They were asked to recommend specific actions in which the Government of Alberta could support libraries by building on the established base of library service; promoting collaboration and innovation; and capitalizing on technology.

The Committee traveled across the province and encountered many Albertans who are passionate and committed to quality library service in their communities.

The input they received was extremely valuable.

It has helped shape a solid framework for supporting a strong public library service that will serve Albertans well into the twenty-first century.

As the Premier stated, this new vision for libraries will focus on creating a network that provides seamless access to information and services across the province.

It will be achieved through the collaboration of many ministries.

Just as we experienced today, students in St. Paul can visit Head-Smashed-In-Buffalo Jump - over 600 kilometers away - without leaving their classroom.

This is made possible by collaborating with ministries like Service Alberta, Education and Culture and Community Spirit.

This vision will be achieved in phases with the initial focus on generating access to selected resources.

Ultimately, cooperation between ministries will result in new and innovative programs for Albertans.

It will also expand on current successes.

For example, the Brooks library has an excellent program for new Canadians.

A new Canadian living in Brooks can access world newspapers and multilingual e-books at the library.

They can get help applying for Canadian citizenship and take a course in tax preparation for new Canadians.

Programs like this should not be isolated – they should be available for all Albertans.

Through collaboration with Employment and Immigration, we want to offer these services to more libraries, benefitting more new Canadians.

Another exceptional program is Aboriginal Family Storytime, offered at Edmonton's Sprucewood Library Branch.

Through collaboration with Aboriginal Relations, programs like this would be more accessible for Aboriginal families living in all corners of our province.

It is programs like these that need to be enhanced and expanded and made available for all Albertans.

In the end, Albertans will benefit from this new vision – library services will be strengthened for all Albertans in the communities where they live, work and read.

I think we can all agree – this kind of access and cooperation just makes sense.

As Premier Stelmach announced, this government is proudly investing 32 million dollars this year in our public libraries.

This is a 9 million dollar funding increase.

Of the 9 million dollar increase, 7 million dollars will go directly to local library boards and regional systems.

The funds will be used to buy new books and DVDs and expand operational hours.

The remaining 2 million dollars will be used to invest in technology and to implement the recommendations in the MLA Committee's report.

This could include a single provincial library card; a broadened scope for videoconferencing; enhanced access to high-speed Internet through Service Alberta's SuperNet; and expanded access to electronic databases, through collaboration with ministries like Advanced Education and Technology.

Our commitment will support libraries for years to come.

This is a great day for libraries.

There is someone who I know would have been overjoyed today; a very special lady – Lois Hole.

I'd like to take a moment to remember Lois.

Lois cared very deeply about children, about books, and about education.

In fact, this exemplified her passion for libraries.

She very much understood and valued the role libraries played in helping and educating all Albertans.

The way she cared for people was truly special.

Her words held great weight. Lois once said: "Within a library can be found the seeds of a better tomorrow."

With this new vision, I believe we will help to ensure Lois' words ring true.

I'd now like to welcome City of Edmonton Mayor Stephen Mandel to the podium to say a few words.

Thank you.