

BRIEF TO MEMBERS OF THE OPPOSITION REGARDING LIBRARIES

March 1, 2001

INTRODUCTION - DIFFERENT TYPES OF LIBRARIES

Many types of libraries serve the needs of different people in Saskatchewan: public libraries, school libraries, college, post-secondary and university libraries, special libraries, and public libraries. Each of these has its own particular mandate to fulfill.

School libraries in the K to 12 education system must operate *in loco parentis* and their focus is to support the curriculum in the schools. Because these libraries operate in a teaching context, and deal with young children, they have a role to play in determining what is appropriate and in selecting materials for children to have access to. School libraries are governed and managed under the umbrella of *The Education Act* and are only one component of the service delivery needs in education that are fulfilled by local school boards.

Post-secondary libraries are more specialized in their collections in order to serve the academic needs of the students and faculty of the institutions of which they are a part. Special libraries are libraries within corporations and institutions that serve internal needs. Government libraries, such as the Legislative Library and the Health Library, and private libraries, such as those established and maintained by the Law Society of Saskatchewan, are examples of these. These libraries are also managed and governed by the internal rules of the organizations of which they are a part.

Public libraries, by contrast, have a mandate to provide access to the world's information to all members of the community, without making any judgements about the relative worth or merit of that information. In this context, the public library does not make selection choices for its patrons and access is provided to anything that is legally available. The public library system in Saskatchewan is an integrated network of seven regions, Regina, Saskatoon and the northern library system. While each system is autonomous in respect of the delivery of library services to its patrons, the systems participate in a province-wide library system based on fundamental principles that are set out in *The Public Libraries Act*, and which include participation in a provincial union catalogue, reciprocal borrowing and inter-library loan, and autonomous library boards.

Municipal public libraries exist in Regina and Saskatoon. The seven regional library systems in southern Saskatchewan are Chinook, Lakeland, Palliser, Parkland, Southeast, Wapiti and Wheatland. The northern part of the province is served by the Pahasimone Library.

To date, funding for libraries is provided largely by the municipalities they serve. Provincial funding for libraries is based on the concept of resource-sharing. The advent of the information age and the crucial role libraries play, and the continuing need for libraries to find new ways of resource sharing, emphasize the need for funding for libraries from senior governments.

All residents of Saskatchewan may access the information in these libraries, in whatever media they are provided, without a user fee. Resource-sharing and co-operation are the fundamental strengths of what is called Saskatchewan's "one province" library system - a system that is the

envy of the country. A history of public library development in Saskatchewan is attached as Appendix A.

THE MULTI-TYPE LIBRARIES CONCEPT

Almost 15 years ago, a forum was held at Echo Valley among invited participants from all areas and aspects of the province to develop a vision for libraries in the 21st century. Out of that initiative has emerged the Multi-type Library Board. The Board is appointed by the Minister responsible for Libraries under the authority of *The Libraries Co-operation Act*. The Act was enacted in 1996, and its long title sets out its purpose: to enable co-operation among all types of autonomous libraries for the provision of library services. This co-operative vision is based on the idea that Saskatchewan, with its dual challenges of a small population scattered over a vast territory, must utilize its scarce resources in the most efficient and effective manner. In addition, the many different types of libraries, each within their own unique governance structures, can present other types of barriers to creating partnerships. However, at the same time, the various types of libraries are autonomous so that the Multi-type Board is not an instrument for imposing decisions made elsewhere on reluctant participants. It is, rather, an instrument for fostering, nurturing and developing good ideas that can work to the benefit of all who choose to participate.

Recent developments with database licensing are a good illustration of how libraries can work together to achieve tangible and positive results. Over the last few years, libraries have worked together in the acquisition of rights to access electronic databases containing various kinds of information by doing two things: they have agreed on the particular databases to which access should be obtained and they have purchased access on behalf of all residents of the province. This means that it is not necessary for universities, colleges, public libraries, special libraries and schools to each negotiate and pay for access for their patrons and clients who in many cases will fall into more than one group. All libraries have benefited by gaining much greater access to anything they could afford on their own **and at a cost that couldn't begin to buy them even a portion of what** they now have readily available. **And, because of the library network, the electronic** access to over 1800 full-text journals provided by the database licences purchased by all of Saskatchewan's libraries is as accessible in La Ronge as it is in Regina.

The Gateway project currently under way in the public library sector is another example. Later this month, all public libraries will be linked through a "gateway" that will allow a search of all public library holdings in the province. Ultimately, it will be possible for the individual patron to search from his or her home computer to find the book they are looking for in any library in the province and to place their own inter-library loan request directly. The universities are investigating similar projects linking them with other universities.

The Multi-type Library Board is also exploring a number of other issues of interest to all libraries. These include virtual reference, a virtual Saskatchewan collection, electronic document delivery, physical delivery systems, and the universal library card. The Board just met in early February and will be meeting again on March 19, 2001. More information can be obtained on the web at www.lib.sk.ca/pleis/multitype.

CHALLENGES FOR LIBRARIES

While a great deal of extremely good work has been done, of course it must continue; not only to provide continuing support for necessary programs and services, but also to meet the new challenges that arise. Libraries face many important issues.

Capital Funding to Continue and Expand Service

The Provincial Government has spent several years securing special funding for the establishment of its visionary network of libraries, the PLEIS system, now to be called "Saskatchewan Libraries". This is an outstanding achievement that utilizes the library materials in the province in a uniquely Saskatchewan way, by sharing resources for the benefit of all.

There is also an urgent need to preserve existing materials and information so that it remains in a useful state for sharing. Several public libraries and system headquarters are in a crisis caused by aging or structurally unsound buildings. In order to protect and maintain library collections to preserve this inheritance for future generations in Saskatchewan, these inadequate physical structures must be repaired or replaced. This will be an on-going need. It is a need that is expanding as libraries have automated to get connected. Computers become obsolete and unrepairable much more quickly than buildings and adds a substantial burden to the capital funding needs of all libraries.

Increased Pool of Library Funding

Changes in funding formulas phased-in respecting grants to regional libraries over the last three years have now resulted in some systems receiving a decrease in funding. For all of the reasons that have already been described, these decreases are devastating to the libraries in those systems. The funding pool must be increased to a level sufficient to restore the funding levels of these systems, while at the same time respecting the allocation of resources among the systems as recognized in the new grant structure.

Access and Communication

The sustainability of Internet access is one of the most pressing concerns for the public library community in Saskatchewan. Being connected levels the information playing field for urban and rural users. While all libraries have now had an opportunity to get connected to the Internet, they have serious concerns about their long-term ability to fund Internet access and online operations. Indeed, 36 public libraries in Saskatchewan have declined funding for Internet access computers because they could not afford the ongoing telecommunications charges.

Internet access is a significant and growing part of the sustainability issue, but the key point remains that, ***without affordable telecommunications access across the entire province, the one-province library system cannot continue to be a reality.***

For libraries, increased costs mean reductions in hours of service or even closures of small branches to pay telecommunications charges in what remains.

CONCLUSION

The one-province library system of which Saskatchewan is so justifiably proud is a remarkable achievement that binds all areas of Saskatchewan together - whether urban or rural, north or south - in a network that not just enhances our quality of life but, in the information age and the age of computers is essential to the viability of our provincial community.