



MLAs Jeff Johnson, Teresa Woo-Paw and Fred Horne at the Alberta Government's library funding increase announcement in Edmonton.

Government report calls for enhanced role for TAL

June 2009... The Alberta Government's recent 39 per cent funding increase for public libraries is accompanied by a major report, *Framework for the Future: Positioning Alberta Libraries for the 21st Century*.

The report's 18 recommendations have broad implications for Alberta's library community. They include a call for an integrated library policy to guide decision-making, and an enhanced role for The Alberta Library (see the full report [HERE](#))

The report is the work of Jeff Johnson, MLA for Athabasca-Redwater, Fred Horne, MLA for Edmonton-Rutherford, and Teresa Woo-Paw, MLA for Calgary-Mackay. The committee attended 11 consultation sessions across the province during September and October 2008. Hundreds of library stakeholders shared their ideas and opinions on how the province can best support libraries.

The Alberta Library asked Fred Horne to share his insights into the consultation process and the library community in Alberta.

During your consultation sessions you met with hundreds of library stakeholders, including library professionals, staff and trustees, municipal leaders, educators, volunteers and others. What was your general impression as you were listening to people talk about libraries and their communities?

Through our consultation we encountered so many Albertans who are passionate and committed to providing quality library services. They recognized that libraries are a fundamental and tremendously important part of community life. They acknowledged that their lives as citizens and collectively as a community are enhanced because of the programs and services they access at their library. Their dedication is both remarkable and infectious. We hope we captured their passion in our report.

Was there anything that surprised you during the consultation process? Did it change the way you look at libraries?

During the consultation process, I was able to experience firsthand, the tremendous impact that libraries have on the lives of Albertans. The MLA Committee heard from hundreds of library stakeholders who shared their ideas on how the province can best support libraries. All of us on the committee saw the passion the library community, library workers, and library users have for their library. It is this passion for libraries that translates into action and involvement in their communities.

Alberta has benefited from the dedication of these people. Their sense of ownership in the system has inspired them to nurture their local libraries, tailoring services to community needs. Libraries have become a community touchstone. Whether you are a child, single parent, senior, or an entrepreneur developing a new idea, you can visit the library, be welcomed, and get the support you need.

Alberta's library system is an excellent example of shared governance, a tremendous success story, but not without its challenges. While autonomy has created strong local libraries and library boards, the flip-side is the evolution of "silos" inadvertently restricting access to certain services, duplicating others, and increasing cost. The challenge for the MLA Committee was to develop recommendations that break down these silos and increase access to libraries without taking away their autonomy.

The report recommends enhancing the role of The Alberta Library. What do you see as some of the important roles that The Alberta Library can play?

The recommendations build on The Alberta Library's significant experience in creating library efficiencies and its already established relationship with library stakeholders. The Alberta Library can take on a greater profile and enhance its role as an umbrella organization that works closely with the publicly funded libraries, regional library systems, and the Government of Alberta. Municipal Affairs will initiate discussions with The Alberta Library on potential ways for its role to be enhanced or expanded by:

- Designing, building and implementing a provincewide technology plan that supports standardization, including wireless communications, and a single library system that will create seamless access to library services.
- Exploring opportunities to implement or pilot new technologies and improve library services.
- Helping implement a single library card that would permit Albertans to access library materials from all publicly funded libraries in Alberta.
- Developing minimum provincewide standards and best practices for library services.
- Planning and implementing a provincewide marketing plan aimed at increasing the awareness of the library services to Albertans.
- Planning and implementing a library workforce strategy that includes attraction, retention and development of public library staff.

One of the key components of the report is the creation of a provincewide technology plan. How important is it for libraries to move to a single operating system?

A provincewide technology plan will help to create a standardized, seamless network of library services. The plan will build on government's investment in the SuperNet, The Alberta Public Library Electronic Network, and existing technologies.

As part of its technology plan, the MLA Committee recommends Alberta move to a single operating system to maximize efficiencies. Currently, there are numerous versions and customizations of the two main operating systems being used. The goal is to achieve better efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of library services throughout the province. A centralized library operating system could streamline

access and enhance collaboration and move us closer to our vision - seamless access to library services and resources for all Albertans.

How has the library community responded to the report? What kind of feedback have you had?

Feedback from the library community has been very positive. They are proud of the work that has been accomplished and know this is a reflection of their passion, vision and foresight.

Last year, the library community was asked to look at ways we could work together to create a strategy that would take libraries into the 21st century, and to think about how Alberta's library service could grow and evolve. It required a lot of hard work, but the library community rose to the occasion by sharing their ideas and giving us the building blocks to develop a framework for libraries. We are looking forward to continuing to work together to create a better future for public libraries and library services in Alberta.