

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES
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Return to Oral Question

Asked by Mr. Nerysoo on June 17, 1986

Reply made by the Honourable Nick Sibbeston,
Government Leader

Chronology of Events Related to Implementation of the Official Languages Act

In response to the Member's question, I have had the chronology prepared, based on the information we have available within our Government's records. The chronology, which begins with the announcement of the Federal Government's intention to impose official bilingualism, is attached and, because of the length of the document, I do not intend to read this into the record. The chronology also responds, in part, to other questions raised in Committee in regards to implementing French language services throughout the N.W.T.

There are several points that I would like to mention that have had an impact on implementing the provisions of the Official Language Act, passed in June, 1984, which resulted in the Executive Council bringing forward an amendment to extend the implementation of all provisions of the Act until 1989. Since signing the original umbrella agreement, several events have occurred that have hindered our efforts to meet the timeframe outlined in the 1984 legislation. Changes in senior management whose responsibilities included language programs; delays in funding approval from Treasury Board; the change in the Federal Government; and the complexity of the task in itself.

This government is committed to implementing the provisions of the Official Language Act, as amended by the Legislative Assembly by continuing to offer programs and services to residents of the N.W.T. in the official aboriginal languages, and in French by 1989.

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CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS
RELATED TO IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT

November, 1983

A Yukon man challenged a speeding ticket on the argument that he was denied the right to communicate with and to receive available services from an institution of the Parliament or Government of Canada contrary to section 20 of the Constitution Act, 1982. The case was to be heard on March 22, 1984.

March 19, 1984

The Honourable John Munro announced that a bill was to be introduced in the House of Commons applying the Official Languages Act and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to Yukon and the Northwest Territories to alleviate any doubt as to the applicability of the official languages provisions of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Mr. Munro also stated that he was committed to providing additional resources to promote native languages and cultural programs.

March 20, 1984

Press release issued by the then Government Leader:
"The Territorial government is "sympathetic" towards a bilingual Canada and is prepared to provide French language services in the Northwest Territories.

But rather than have bilingualism imposed on it from Ottawa his administration would be developing its own program. The issue of bilingualism in the North would be placed before the Legislative Assembly in May in order to seek the direction of the House.

At the same time, there has to be recognition of the north's priority requirements in the area of funding the development of aboriginal languages."

April 5, 1984

A commitment was received from Hon. John Munro to delay federal legislation "to allow Executive Council time... to bring forward its own legislation."

May 2 & 3, 1984

The then Government Leader met with the Hon. Mr. Joyal and Munro to present a draft memorandum of understanding concerning federal commitments to recognize territorial jurisdiction and to provide additional resources for language services.

May 4, 1984

A Federal delegation visited Yellowknife to discuss the provision of resources and levels of service to be provided in French and Aboriginal languages. Verbal commitments were made to:

- Provide all funds to implement French language services.
- Provide funds to undertake a study leading to the development of a comprehensive plan to enhance native language services.
- Provide all necessary funds to implement this plan.

May - June, 1984

On the direction of the Executive Council, GNWT officials from the Priorities and Planning Secretariat, Statistics Bureau and Departments of Information, Education and Justice prepared documentation detailing the need for and the costs of aboriginal language enhancement in the Northwest Territories.

A senior official within the Department of the Executive, Mr. Larry Gilberg was tasked by the then Government Leader with the responsibility for consolidation of all information pertaining to Aboriginal and French language development in the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Nerysoo travelled to Ottawa to negotiate funding for the provision of services in the Aboriginal and French languages.

June 27, 1984

The Hon. Richard Nerysoo addressed the Legislative Assembly:
"We are faced with a situation where if we reject the official languages bill, we will receive no funding for aboriginal languages and yet we will not be able to prevent the government of Canada from imposing French as an official language of the Territories."

June 28, 1984

An Ordinance to Recognize and Provide for the Use of Aboriginal Languages and to Establish the Official Languages of the Northwest Territories (Official Languages Ordinance) was passed by the Legislative Assembly.

On the same day, an umbrella agreement was signed by the Government Leader and the Secretary of State which provided for \$16 million over 5 years for the "preservation, development, and enhancement of official languages and provision of services in those languages." Any costs associated with the implementation of French as an official language were to be provided by the Government of Canada in addition to the funding provided for Aboriginal languages.

July 25, 1984

The Government of Canada approved-in-principle the funding called for under the agreement, subject to Treasury Board approval. The Government of the Northwest Territories was required to submit specific program proposals to access this funding which would be paid under contribution agreements.

September 28, 1984

With the retirement of Mr. Gilberg in the summer, Mr. Brian Lewis was appointed, effective October 5, to head the priority project on languages which included responsibilities related to languages, their use, revival, preservation and enhancement as well as to recommend organizational changes within the GNWT to enhance program delivery. In the press release announcing the appointment, Mr. Nerysoo was quoted, "this government wants the native languages to be recognized in the Canadian Constitution as Official languages of the NWT, along side both English and French."

October, 1984 to January, 1985

Under the direction of the then Government Leader, plans for a language commission were drawn up and underwent several revisions. A Plan proposing the establishment of an Aboriginal Languages Task Force rather than a commission was agreed on along with terms of reference.

March, 1985

The issue of languages and the role of the Task Force on Aboriginal Languages arose in the Legislative Assembly. Mr. Nerysoo indicated that appointments to the Task Force had not been made due to difficulties in coming to an agreement regarding the appointment of Dene members.

Mr. Nerysoo also stated at that time that he did not have confirmation in writing from the Federal Government regarding funds to implement provision of French language services called for in the original agreement.

May, 1985

Richard Nerysoo submitted specific language project proposals to the Honourable Walter MacLean, Secretary of State of Canada in order to access funding specified in the agreement reached in June, 1984. Projects totalling \$2,777,000 were put forward.

June 11, 1985

Walter MacLean replied, stating he had asked his officials to draft a contribution agreement specifying the "purposes, amounts, and conditions governing Canada's Contribution of \$16 million for aboriginal languages over a five-year period.

On the same day, the Executive Council recommended that approval be given to support the Aboriginal Language Projects developed as per the

agreement with the government of Canada.

June 25, 1985

The Financial Management Board approved Department of Education projects related to Aboriginal Language Projects.

August 15, 1985

The Government Leader announced the appointment of five members and the Terms of Reference for the GNWT's Task Force on Aboriginal Languages.

September, 1985

A new Federal Government was elected. Due to the election, Treasury Board submissions were delayed. Included in these was the Contribution Agreement on Aboriginal Language Projects.

October 15, 1985

Benoit Bouchard, the newly elected Minister, Secretary of State telexed the Government Leader reconfirming that the contribution agreement prepared some months before would be submitted to the Treasury Board for approval of the funds specified in the Draft Contribution Agreement so that 1985/86 funds could be released.

November, 1985

New Government Leader, Nick Sibbeston, appointed.

GNWT officials and the Executive Director of the French Cultural Association travelled to New Brunswick to examine the implications of introducing French as an Official language.

December 5, 1985

The Executive Council recommended that funding be requested from the Secretary of State to hire a consultant for the purpose of preparing a long term action plan for the introduction of French as an official language in the Northwest Territories.

Also, in light of the complexities of implementation and the short time remaining, it was recommended that the Official Languages Act be amended to delay coming into force of the French language provision by three years.

The hiring of a bilingual lawyer and two translators was also recommended.

December 19, 1985

The Secretary of State indicated it would be preparing a contribution agreement to fund the hiring of Michel Bastarache to develop the French language action plan recommended by the Executive Council. This report is being prepared and is scheduled for completion by February, 1987.

December 20, 1985

The GNWT announced the agreement reached with the Secretary of State regarding the items recommended by the Executive Council on December 5.

December 23, 1985

-A letter was sent from the Government Leader to the Department of Justice requesting the department examine the possibility of proclaiming the aboriginal languages of the Northwest Territories as official languages together with French. He also requested amendments to the Official Languages Act be drafted for consideration by the Legislative Assembly to extend the implementation date of French as an official language by three years.

-The Government Leader confirmed that the Secretary of State had agreed to:

-The secondment of a senior project officer to the Dept. of Culture and Communications with the responsibility for implementing French language services.

-Funding to hire a bilingual lawyer and legislative draftsman.

-The Government Leader also confirmed that Treasury Board had approved \$16 million funding over a five year period for Aboriginal Language Projects.

February 13, 1986

First reading of the amendment to the Official Languages Act extending the coming into force of French as an official language by three years.

February 17, 1986

Second reading of the amendment.

March, 1986

The Hon. Mr. Bouchard came to Yellowknife for the signing of the first Contribution Agreement related to Aboriginal Languages and to present a cheque in the amount of \$950,000 for 1985/86 aboriginal language development projects.

Development of the Contribution Agreement for 1986/87 began as well as accounting for expenditures related to the 1985/86 Agreement.

May 16, 1986

The Executive Council directed that the Minister of Culture and Communications be designated the responsible Minister for the co-ordination, development and monitoring of the Canada/NWT Contribution Agreement for Aboriginal Languages and for the co-ordination, development and monitoring of plans regarding implementation of bilingualism in the Northwest Territories.

May, 1986

Discussions took place between Secretary of State officials and GNWT officials concerning three person years for the Department of Justice; Legal Counsel and two lawyers, all bilingual with one designated as providing support to the Legislative Assembly when it is in Session. These three positions require confirmation by the Secretary of State. Two positions with the Department of Culture were agreed upon at that time and will be filled in the near future.

Meetings also took place between Michel Bastarache, Secretary of State and Department of Culture and Communications Officials, and Mr. Denault of the French Cultural Association regarding developments to that date.