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Government of the Northwest Territories
Response
to the Recommendations of the
Task Force on Aboriginal Languages

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BACKGROUND

The Task Force on Aboriginal Languages was established by the Government of the Northwest Territories to make recommendations on how aboriginal languages should be used, developed and promoted.

It made recommendations concerning:

1. An official status for aboriginal languages
2. Establishment of new institutions and their responsibilities
3. Specific language measures both within and outside Government

INTRODUCTION

The task force, funded under the Canada-Northwest Territories Agreement on Contributions for Aboriginal Languages, tabled its report at the winter session of the NWT Legislative Assembly. The report was discussed again at the June sitting and the Government was directed to table its implementation plan during the October session.

In considering the document, the Government examined its existing language programs -presently costing an estimated \$5,000,000 a year. As well it considered the limited amount of money available under the Canada-NWT agreement.

The Government has concluded that much has already been accomplished within its existing programs and institutions that meet the direction and spirit of the Task Force recommendations. In a number of specific areas the recommendations have been used to establish new direction for government programs or to strengthen existing initiatives.

In formulating its response, the Government has been aware that the \$16 million fund contained within the Canada-NWT language agreement will not be large enough to meet total public and Government expectations. The Government, therefore, must give priority to those proposals and recommendations of the Task Force that promise to have the greatest impact on increasing the maintenance and use of aboriginal languages in the Northwest Territories both within and outside Government.

The following is the government's response to the Task Force recommendations:

OFFICIAL STATUS

01. The Task Force recommends that all of the rights and duties which make up the official status of aboriginal languages be enacted through amendments to the Official Languages Act of the Northwest Territories and not be left to determination by regulation or Government policy.

Response:

The Government agrees with this recommendation and has begun dealing with the matter of which language rights and duties can be enacted in legislation.

In this respect, the Department of Justice has been instructed to prepare amendments to the Official Languages Act that will legally guarantee aboriginal language rights within the Northwest Territories.

The Government plans to present the amendments to the House during the life of this Assembly.

NEW INSTITUTIONS

02. The Task Force recommends that a new Ministry of Aboriginal Languages and Culture be established as well as Dene and Inuit Advisory Councils and two Commissioners of Official Languages, each with a support staff.

Response:

The Government understands the concerns of the Task Force in this recommendation and recognizes the desirability of having a central lead Department dealing with language issues under the direction of an Aboriginal Minister. However, the specific recommendation to establish a new Ministry in the manner outlined by the Task Force cannot be accepted at this time. The present constitutional basis of the Legislative Assembly does not permit the election of a Minister in the manner suggested.

Nevertheless, the Government has acted in a manner designed to meet the spirit of the recommendation through recent changes in ministerial responsibilities.

The Government believes that the new Department of Culture & Communications, created in December, 1985, is capable of providing the central co-ordination of language matters desired by the Task Force. The recent appointment of Dene and Inuit managers to senior and mid-management positions in charge of language and cultural affairs programs in the Department strengthen that capability. In addition, a new section headed by an aboriginal person has also been established within the Department of Education to deal primarily with aboriginal language and curriculum development for schools.

Rather than spend agreement monies on a new ministry and support structure, the Government intends to work, for the time being, within its existing organizational framework with the Department of Culture and Communications taking a lead role in the implementation of task force recommendations. The Department of Education will maintain its current initiatives in the areas of establishing local controls, bilingual teacher training and aboriginal language curriculum development.

(It is estimated that creation of a new ministry would require the addition of \$1 million a year to the budget already held by the Language Bureau. That budget has already been increased by a contribution of \$1.3 million from the languages agreement. As a result, creation of a new ministry would use over one-half of the federal money available in 1987-88 and would force other departments, particularly Education, to cut back on their initiatives and put at risk any chance of funding the requirements of providing further services recommended by the Task Force.)

The Government supports the idea of a Commissioner of Official Languages and will work towards establishment of a single Commissioner of Official Languages once aboriginal and French language rights of the Official Languages Act are finalized and proclaimed.

As well, rather than form two new advisory councils (Dene & Inuit), the Minister of Culture & Communication will ensure consultation with the Inuit Cultural Institute and the Dene Cultural Institute (once it is formed) on language-related matters.

RECOMMENDATIONS SPECIFIC TO THE LANGUAGE BUREAU

03. The task force recommends the Government recognize interpreting and translating in aboriginal languages as professional occupations which are a key part of Government service to the majority of its citizens, and classify and compensate them accordingly.

Reponse:

The Government agrees with the recommendation. Each position in the Language Bureau recently went through a re-classification process and the compensation and benefits paid to the Bureau members is equivalent, in some cases higher, than similar positions in other organizations and jurisdictions. Formal recognition of interpreter/translators as professionals will follow as certification processes (currently being developed) are finalized and applied.

04. The Task Force recommends that intensive training programs must be developed for interpreter/translators, and special training courses in simultaneous interpreting are needed. Upgrading in the aboriginal languages and English must also be made available to interpreters who are expected to translate into English from aboriginal languages as well as from English into aboriginal languages.

Response:

The Government recognizes that improvements are needed in the training of interpreters and translators. Steps have already been taken to improve the professional development of interpreter/translators in the Language Bureau and to establish a new training program through Arctic College.

Since the Language Bureau was formed in 1972 (as the NWT Interpreter Corps), it has attempted to address its own training needs. In more recent years, a competency-based training program has been developed that contains 13 learning bands and a total of 152 skills. This program provides the framework for training interpreter/translators for positions classified at the following levels:

- Level 1 - Clerk Translator
- Level 2 - Assistant Interpreter/Communicator
- Level 3 - Interpreter/Communicator
- Level 4 - Specialized Interpreter/Communicator
- Level 5 - Regional Managers

The training uses a combination of on-the-job, off-premise workshops and university accredited linguistic courses for Dene employees (similar credit courses are being finalized for Inuit employees through the University of Victoria and the University of McGill). Grade level equivalencies in the English language are at the 11 to 12 level for the Dene section and at the 9 and 10 level for the Inuit section. Language training is part of the training program and regular English language courses are scheduled to resume next month.

Refinement in the area of specialized simultaneous courses will be possible on completion of the Language Bureau's training centre. The centre will have all the professional tools required to teach and upgrade simultaneous skills.

In recognition that the Language Bureau training resources ought to concentrate on areas of professional development, discussions have taken place between the Department of Culture and Communications, the Arctic College and the Department of Education to transfer interpreter/translator training to the College. Through the Arctic College, graduates would receive certification as licensed interpreters and translators.

It is anticipated that an interpreter/translator program could begin to be delivered in September, 1987, and it would likely be possible to negotiate recognition of these courses for university credit.

Once in place the program will provide interpreter training opportunities to any resident of the NWT interested in pursuing a professional career as an interpreter/translator with the Language Bureau or other organizations or, for that matter, the private sector.

05. The task force recommends that specialist categories within interpreting and translating must be recognized, and special training programs must be developed in these areas, which include law, medicine, science and industry. Such specializations may include having some interpreters interpret only from English to Inuktitut or from only Inuktitut to English. The interpreter specialists must be compensated and treated as specialists are in any field.

Response:

The Language Bureau will address this need at the completion of current language initiatives within the Department of Justice and the Department of Health. Development of specialists will, to a large extent, be dependent on the ability of the Language Bureau to increase its current staff of 35 interpreters - all of whom are in continual demand for assignments in unrelated areas with Government clients and clients outside Government.

The Language Bureau also recognizes the southern standards in respect to interpreting practices (one direction only). While it would be desirable to implement this practice, it does not have the numbers of interpreters to accomplish it.

06. The Task Force recommends that training courses offered by Government should not be limited to just those interpreters and translators who work for the Government. All people working in the interpreting and translating field should be able to take advantage of such training in this developing field.

Response:

The Government is in complete agreement with this recommendation and views the need to broaden training opportunities to interpreters and translators outside Government as a priority matter. Although its Language Bureau does extend invitations to interpreters outside Government to participate in its work shops and has assisted organizations, from time to time, with their training needs, its staff and finances have been somewhat limited..

Development of an interpreter/translator course through Arctic Colleges will resolve this short-fall.

RECOMMENDATIONS SPECIFIC TO EDUCATION

07. The Task Force recommends that a new Ministry of Aboriginal Languages and Culture have responsibility in the areas of education, including teacher training and curriculum development - as well as for setting standards and certification in professional language areas including those affecting aboriginal teachers.

Response:

The Government understands the Task Force's concerns in this area, but for the time being believes that the present objectives and initiatives of the Department of Education in the areas of language and cultural programs designed for classroom purposes should continue as planned in close co-operation with the Department of Culture & Communications through a sharing of professional resources.

A primary objective of the Department of Education will be to continue to moving quickly to decentralize authority for the development of aboriginal language curriculum to local and regional authorities. The primary vehicles to support this decentralized approach are the department's new Centres for Teaching and Learning.

Centres for Teaching and Learning are being established to decentralize efforts to co-ordinate, develop, monitor and implement programs in various language areas. Secondly, these centres will be used as a base for the field-based Teacher Education Program, the main objective of which is to get bilingual teachers into the teaching profession.

Three centres have been established in Fort Franklin, Fort Simpson and Eskimo Point this year. Future plans are to establish centres in the next fiscal year to serve the Dogrib and Inuvialuktun language areas. Centres in the Baffin and Kitikmeot regions will provide for continued Inuktitut curriculum work.

The Department of Culture & Communications will be responsible for development of Government language policy and direction and certification standards for aboriginal languages.

08. The Task Force recommends that the Education Act be revised to provide legally enforceable (bilingual) language education rights to ensure that aboriginal languages are taught and used appropriately in schools. In addition, regulations affecting the use of aboriginal languages and cultures in the education system should be the responsibility of the new Ministry of Aboriginal Languages and Culture.

Response:

The Government through the Department of Education intends to develop new courses incorporating aboriginal language, history and culture, and that the aboriginal language courses be available for students at all grade levels.

In the next 15 years, the department considers first language immersion and second language programs for Kindergarten to Grade 9 can be developed for Inuktitut, Inuvialuktun, Slavey and Dogrib. Similar programs for Kindergarten to Grade 3 could be developed for Loucheux and Chipewyan. As well native language programs could be developed for instruction in High Schools and for adult education. These goals will depend on the availability of additional financial and human resources.

With respect to incorporating language education rights in the Education Act, the department recognizes that existing language and cultural sections of the legislation are weak and plans to strengthen these sections to reflect the priority language and culture has been given by the general public and the Legislative Assembly. The act is being reviewed and will be revised over the next two years.

One of the critical policy decisions which will be reflected in the new act is the importance of local control. Local authorities and ultimately parents should have the opportunity to make decisions regarding the language education of their children. This principle may be in conflict with the Task Force concept of legislating language rights by community size.

(It is estimated that a "genuinely bilingual education system" in all NWT schools would cost an additional \$8 to \$10 million a year. Given the cost, the present linguistic status of some language groups, and a realistic assessment of potential resources, the Department of Education will give priority to the development of solid bilingual programs for Kindergarten to Grade 6.)

09. The Task Force recommends that to create a bilingual education system, the Minister of Aboriginal Languages and Culture - in consultation with Inuit and Dene Elders Councils - would be responsible for developing appropriate curriculum for teaching aboriginal language and culture in classrooms and in developing high school courses on social and cultural studies in native languages. The ministry would share responsibility for developing appropriate curricula for instruction in English, and over-all high school curriculum with the Department of Education.

The Task Force also recommends that on-the-land immersion programs should be given an honoured and mandatory place in the school curriculum and the northern society courses be developed for Grades 1 through 12 to be taught in each of the aboriginal languages.

Response:

The Government through the Department of Education intends to establish Divisional Boards which are likely to follow language boundaries in all areas of the NWT. The boards will have increased autonomy in curriculum development, particularly in language and cultural areas.

The Baffin Divisional Board, which has now been established for two years, has made a significant impact on the establishment of instruction in Inuktitut and its use as a medium of instruction.

The department is already supporting curriculum development projects through Centres of Teaching and Learning. It provides funding, monitors and assesses projects, and provides the expertise required in specialized areas.

Past efforts to centralize curriculum development and implementation have proven to be frustrating for both the department and local education authorities. To retain centralized curriculum development responsibility and complicate it with involvement by another department will likely lead to even more frustrations.

In response to recommendations concerning on-the-land immersion programs and northern society courses for Grades 1 to 12, the department has already begun to address the proposals. Two on-the-land immersion programs are planned to be pilot tested this year and an Inuit and Dene studies program for high school is being developed.

10. The Task Force recommends that the Minister of Aboriginal Languages and Culture jointly be responsible with the Department of Education for the overall design and delivery of teacher training programs

Response:

The Government agrees that there ought to be a co-operative approach as outlined in this recommendation and will ensure that co-operation is maximized between Culture & Communicatins and Education.

At this time, the Government believes that the goals of the Task Force in teacher training are being implemented and that the Department of Education, through a recent restructuring of its teacher training programs, is demonstrating favourable progress in this important area.

The training of bilingual teachers has been an important component of the Teacher Education Program (TEP) since 1977. It was since that time that courses in native language fluency and literacy, and native language methodology were developed and delivered. Most of these courses were delivered by Department of Education language specialists.

Since then, TEP has be reorganized into a western and eastern campus.

The Western Arctic Teacher Education Program now provides field-based and institutional courses. Despite limited funds and the number of Dene languages, 32 bilingual teachers have graduated from this program. An additional 30 have been exposed to one of the native languages and have a basic understanding of the functioning of languages. This year, 38 bilingual students are enrolled in the west and it is expected that these numbers will double within two years.

The field-based program will be provided in communities where Centres for Teaching and Learning are situated, thus providing candidates with training in bilingual teaching close to home and in their own linguistic and cultural milieu.

The Eastern Arctic Teacher Education Program, established to train teachers to teach in Inuktitut at the K-3 level, has been underway since 1979. Since then, 48 persons have graduated and 3 have gone on to complete bachelor degrees in education at McGill University. At present, about 40% of all K-3 positions in the Baffin, Keewatin and Eastern Kitikmeot are filled by bilingual staff.

11. The Task Force recommends that more adult education programs be available at the community level to assist people to develop greater literacy in the aboriginal languages. Such programs would also be available for young people who have dropped out of school. The availability, standards and delivery of such courses should be the responsibility of the Ministry of Aboriginal Languages and Culture.

Response:

Adult education is being administered by regional education offices or through the Divisional Board. The question of whether adult education more properly rests with the Arctic College is currently being debated. Traditionally, adult education has been perceived by communities as being an opportunity for academic upgrading essential for job training and likely that will continue to be the main focus.

As recommended by the Task Force, courses can and have been offered in aboriginal languages as requested.

It is the department of Education's intention to develop evening-study language programs that are made available for delivery through the Arctic College or Centres for Teaching and Learning in all interested communities. It is anticipated that young people could attend these courses but it is hoped that in the future, as fewer students drop out of school, the need for adult education for young people will no longer be so critical.

12. The Task Force recommends that public awareness on the status and education options available for aboriginal languages be increased both in the schools and in the community at large.

Response:

The Government agrees with this recommendation. The Department of Education has expanded the public awareness program this year to promote the development of Divisional Boards and to increase attendance. An awareness campaign focussing on language and culture has begun and will be increased in 1987-88.

13. The Task Force recommends that training programs should be delivered, where possible, in aboriginal languages as well as English.

Response:

The Department of Education is responsible for the delivery of general staff training programs. It is expected that first and second year language programs will be delivered through Arctic College and/or Centres for Teaching and Learning and that Government employees could attend these courses.

In respect to the delivery of general training programs in the aboriginal languages, the department will work towards this goal - where possible. Depending on the language proficiency of instructors, courses delivered by Government staff in communities may be delivered in aboriginal languages. Courses delivered by southern contractors would have to be translated and the availability of the translation services would depend on availability of Interpreter/Translators.

OTHER LANGUAGE MEASURES

GOVERNMENT SERVICES

14. The right to receive and the duty to provide medical services in communities and regions. Production of necessary Inuktitut materials and production of specialized medical interpreters.

Response:

In its brief to the Task Force last year, the Department of Health recommended production of a medical terminology guide. The guide is considered necessary in order to train professional interpreter/translators within the Health Care field.

Since that presentation, the department has received funding and has begun the process involved in producing such a guide. In addition it is drafting goals, objectives and strategies concerning Health Care interpreting/translator services for ministerial review.

The document is based on a departmental principle that all residents should be able to fully understand the health and medical services that are being provided. The goal is to establish and seek funding for a system whereby health services are provided to residents of the NWT in their mother tongue.

15. The right to receive and duty to provide health care, social services (welfare, UIC, family services) wildlife and air transport services in communities and regions.

Response:

The Government agrees in respect to those areas that fall within its jurisdiction. The Government Leader will undertake immediate discussions with Federal officials in respect to programs such as UIC. A letter has already been sent to air carriers operating into and from point-to-point within the territories concerning development of emergency and flight safety information into the aboriginal languages. The translation services of the Language Bureau have been offered to assist them with this task.

16. Standardization of written Dene Languages within the next 10 years.

Response:

The Government agrees that a concentrated effort must be made in respect to standardization and the Language Bureau is presently developing a budget proposal to fund development of standardized written Dene Languages. The budget plan would allow Government and organizations and individuals outside Government, to form a commission or task force beginning in 1987 which will be assigned the responsibility of consultation and development of a process for the standardization.

COURTS

17. The right to use the language in criminal proceedings (including the right to be tried by a jury whose members speak the language), and in family proceedings involving children and establishment of a court interpreter program and improved training and salaries for native courtworkers.

Response:

The Department of Justice has been funded and is presently implementing a review that will identify an interpreting / translating framework for legal purposes. This review is scheduled to be completed by March 31/87 and will define the foundation on which a multi-language justice system might operate in the NWT. In addition, the recent amendments to the Jury Act (when proclaimed) will allow for unilingual jurors and - as a result - will legally guarantee interpreting services in jury trials.

18. The duty to provide interpreters soon as possible on arrest, search or seizure, or apprehension of a child or mentally incompetent person.

Response:

The Department of Justice will initiate immediate discussions with the RCMP to review and refine procedures in this area and to explore optional approaches for use in instances where an interpreter is not immediately available.

19. The duty to issue judicial decisions where the trial was conducted in the languages, or (for all regional aboriginal languages), where the decision involves a point of law important to the public.

Response:

The practice of translating decisions will be put into place by the Language Bureau following consultation with the Department of Justice.

20. The right to use aboriginal languages in all court proceedings and establishment of one or more bilingual RCMP (or community police) in each community.

Response:

The Government through the Department of Justice is presently examining the extent to which this service can be provided in the courts of the Northwest Territories.

The Government will continue to encourage the establishment of bilingual RCMP members in northern communities.

LEGISLATURE

21. A legal right for members of the Legislative Assembly to use languages in the House and proceedings of the assembly and a duty to make available non-authoritative summaries of bills and resolutions.

Response:

The Government agrees fully with this recommendation and will incorporate it into the amendments to the Official Languages Act.

22. A duty to make available agendas, resolutions and minutes of meetings of municipal councils and other Government local or regional boards and committees.

Response:

The Government supports the concept of this recommendation, but does not consider it practical at this time to legislate the duty. Rather, it will encourage the various municipal councils and other government local or regional boards and committees (which are not already doing so) to produce their materials in the working languages of the community or region.

WITHIN AND OUTSIDE THE GOVERNMENT

23. Identification of bilingual positions

Response:

The Government through the Department of Personnel has undertaken a review of the mother-tongue language status of the NWT Public service and is also researching the matter of designated bilingual positions and the practice of bilingual bonuses for designated positions.

24. Provision of airline services, schedules and other flight information in aboriginal languages. Provision of flight safety and flight-attendant information in aboriginal languages.

Response:

A letter has been sent by the Minister of Culture & Communications to airlines operating into and from point-to-point in the NWT on this matter. In conjunction with this approach, the Language Bureau has offered free translation services to the airline industry. As well CBC will be contacted concerning its policies regarding items of concern to its northern audience such as airline schedules, arrivals and departures.

25. The Government should encourage federal Government departments, active in the north to use aboriginal languages as well as English and French when dealing with people living in primarily aboriginal communities and regions.

Response:

This recommendation will be brought to the attention of the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs by the Government Leader and will be discussed with him at the earliest opportunity.

26. Training programs in journalism are required for native language broadcasters. A formal communications training program should be developed by the Government in order to train more northern residents in communications skills.

Response:

The Government through the Department of Education has formed a Communication Arts Advisory Committee with the objective of establishing a journalism course through its Arctic Colleges Program. The committee held its initial meeting on this matter in September.

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