



## SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

### First Session of the 35<sup>th</sup> Yukon Legislative Assembly

Delivered by the Commissioner of Yukon,  
the Honourable Angélique Bernard.

**May 11, 2021.**

**Honourable members, friends, and fellow Yukoners**, we are gathered today on the traditional territories of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Ta'an Kwächän Council.

It is an honour to address this Assembly, whose members represent the great people of the Yukon, residing on the traditional territories of 14 distinct First Nations with whom we share this land.

This Assembly has represented the will of Yukoners for over 40 years ever since the territory achieved responsible government.

Many individuals have made important contributions to the governance of our territory during that time.

This includes two of my esteemed predecessors, former Yukon Commissioners Art Pearson and Doug Bell.

Sadly, both of them passed away recently – Mr. Pearson in December and Mr. Bell in April.

Both were directly involved in one of the most significant transitions in the territory's history.

Mr. Pearson was a scientist and environmentalist. He became Commissioner in 1976, at a time when members were advocating for more responsibilities to be placed in the hands of elected officials.

Mr. Pearson later went into business and became president of the Chamber of Commerce. He also created the Yukon Lotteries Commission and was involved in the establishment of the Yukon Science Institute.

Mr. Bell served as a Whitehorse City Councillor before becoming Deputy Commissioner under Mr. Pearson. In 1979 as the territory's Administrator and later as Commissioner, Mr. Bell oversaw the transition to the territory's first wholly elected Cabinet, forever transforming governance in the territory.

Mr. Bell was committed to accountable government, and later joined the fourth estate as the publisher of the Yukon News.

A passionate writer who took great joy in serving his community, Mr. Bell was appointed to the Order of Canada and awarded the Order of Yukon in recognition of his life of service.

Yukoners across the territory were also saddened to learn of the recent passing of Darius Elias and Archie Lang.

Both were respected Members of this Assembly.

Mr. Elias faithfully represented the Vuntut Gwitchin people of Old Crow for 10 years.

His service to his community and dedication to the land began in his youth and carried on throughout his life.

Mr. Elias was a fierce and articulate advocate for the Porcupine Caribou Herd and travelled extensively to educate the world about its critical habitat and cultural importance to the Gwitchin people.

Mr. Lang represented Porter Creek Centre for nearly a decade, serving as a Cabinet Minister in several portfolios.

A great champion of the Yukon, Mr. Lang operated several businesses throughout the territory focused on tourism and hospitality.

Mr. Lang's encyclopedic knowledge of the territory's history and deft sense of humour contributed to his legendary storytelling and larger than life personality.

All Yukoners have benefitted from the contributions Mr. Pearson, Mr. Bell, Mr. Lang and Mr. Elias made to our territory. We offer our sincere condolences to their families and all their friends.

Your government has worked tirelessly to make the territory a better place to live for all Yukoners.

It has partnered with other governments to grow the territory's economy while protecting the environment and investing in healthier communities.

The territory has enjoyed economic growth every year since 2016, including during the pandemic.

Yukon continues to have the lowest unemployment rate in the country.

Your government has built strong relationships with Yukon First Nations to advance reconciliation.

The revitalization of the Yukon Forum has allowed leaders from across the territory to collaborate and advance joint priorities for the benefit of all Yukoners.

Much can be accomplished when we are paddling in the same direction.

Yukon is the first jurisdiction in Canada with a strategy to respond to the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and Two-Spirit plus individuals.

This territory-wide strategy embodies the promise to change this tragic national story from one of grief, desperation and loss to one of healing, grace and reconciliation.

It is another example of how the Yukon continues to lead the country when it comes to meaningful reconciliation with First Nations people.

Your government has improved health care services, expanded mental health resources, decreased surgical wait times, and made medical travel more flexible and affordable.

It has modernized legislation and policies to make the territory more inclusive and welcoming for all Yukoners.

It has increased housing options for Yukoners by investing in affordable community and seniors' housing throughout the territory and supporting the private sector and NGOs to build more housing units.

Your government has also worked in collaboration with First Nations and municipalities to develop a territory-wide strategy to tackle climate change and build a strong, resilient and sustainable future for the territory.

Yukon's economy is strong, even in the midst of a pandemic.

Reducing the tax burden on businesses and increasing local procurement opportunities has helped Yukon businesses hire more staff and diversify products and services.

Creating a 5-year Capital Plan to inform businesses, First Nations and municipalities about infrastructure projects has increased coordination and improved planning for construction projects.

Developing the Yukon Tourism Development Strategy in collaboration with the tourism sector has set a 10-year vision that takes a whole of Yukon approach to sustainable tourism.

Working with partners to open the NorthLight Innovation Hub – the first in the North – and investing in our entrepreneurs has positioned the Yukon as a leader in the tech and knowledge sectors while increasing local training and investment opportunities.

An enduring commitment to growing and diversifying the economy while supporting local businesses has built up our economic resiliency.

Your government recognizes there is much more work to do to keep building on what has been accomplished over the last 5 years.

This is a rare moment in the history of our territory.

For the first time in nearly 30 years, Yukoners have elected a minority government to lead them forward.

Yukoners have sent a clear message that we need to move forward together for the benefit of our territory.

There is much more that unites us than divides us, and the path forward will be found on common ground.

Your government is committed to taking a new approach to governance and working collaboratively to make the Yukon a better place to live.

To this end, an innovative agreement has been established between two parties representing the majority of Yukoners to ensure a strong, stable government to guide the Yukon forward over the next two years.

It identifies agreed upon areas where government can take immediate action to benefit Yukoners in a way that is supported by the Members of this Assembly.

The agreement will advance a range of important legislative and policy initiatives that will make democracy work for people while addressing climate change and protecting the environment.

It will create jobs in a sustainable economy, improve the services people count on and make life more affordable for Yukoners.

This agreement is founded on the belief that this Assembly works best when all Members can put forward good ideas and come together to support those ideas that advance the public good.

It embodies the spirit of collaboration and puts the people of the Yukon at the forefront of our politics.

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The global COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced the need to put people at the heart of our decision-making.

In the past year and a half, more than 150 million people worldwide have contracted this deadly disease, including more than 1.2 million Canadians.

The pandemic has tested, and continues to test, the strength of our healthcare systems and the resiliency of our social fabric.

Every single Yukoner has been impacted by the pandemic.

From daycares to schools, workplaces to social events, your lives have been disrupted on an unprecedented scale.

Despite many challenges, the Yukon has demonstrated tremendous resolve in the face of this public health emergency.

Following the recommendations of our public health officials has allowed us to contain the spread of COVID-19 in our territory and keep our case count low.

Swift and comprehensive government intervention has ensured individuals and businesses are supported and our communities remain healthy and safe.

Your government worked collaboratively with its territorial, provincial and federal colleagues, advocating strongly for northern, remote and Indigenous communities to receive priority access to vaccines as soon as they became available.

As a result of strong leadership, the people of the Yukon had the opportunity to be immunized from COVID-19 well before the rest of Canada and much of the world.

Yukoners stepped up and took their shot, and our territory is leading the country in vaccination rates.

We are in this very fortunate position thanks to our dedicated team of health care professionals, public servants and community leaders.

Most importantly, we are in a fortunate position thanks to the vigilance and community-minded spirit of Yukoners.

While our territory has responded well, the pandemic is not over.

Its effects will continue to be felt as we go forward.

Your government will continue to provide strong, steady leadership to protect the health and safety of Yukoners and help them maintain their livelihoods.

The support programs put in place by your government have become the gold standard across Canada and they will continue to be provided for as long as they are needed.

This includes the Paid Sick Leave rebate, the Yukon Business Relief Program, the Tourism Accommodations Sector Support and the Tourism Non-Accommodation Sector Support.

Government will ensure Yukon businesses have the assistance they need when they need it.

Your government will keep working closely with Yukon's Chief Medical Officer of Health to continually re-evaluate the level of restrictions that are put in place to protect Yukoners from COVID-19.

It will work towards re-opening our borders safely to ensure that Yukon's tourism and visitor economy can return to normal as soon as possible.

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Like other parts of the country, our territory is in the grip of another public health crisis that has been overshadowed by COVID-19 – one that is more silent, and much more tragic.

In the past five years, 40 Yukoners have lost their lives to opioids.

Families and communities throughout the territory are grieving from this tragedy.

Significant action has been taken over the past several years to combat opioid overdoses and reduce harm to our communities.

Yukon's mental wellness and substance use hubs have dramatically improved access to withdrawal services, counselling and inpatient treatments in rural communities.

The introduction and expansion of opioid medical treatments at the Referred Care Clinic has helped individuals address substance use problems.

The take-home naloxone program and expanded drug checking services have helped to save lives.

The opioid crisis in the Yukon would have been much worse without these critical interventions.

Yet, it is clear more must be done to address the pernicious effects of opioids on our communities.

Your government will continue to build on the success of these initiatives and it will increase the resources available to those who need support.

Yukon's mental health resources will be coordinated to provide mental health services to all Yukoners seven days per week.

Immediate action will be taken to develop a safe drug supply program for the territory along with a supervised consumption site.

These innovative programs have been shown to significantly decrease substance related deaths across Canada and will help us reduce the harm caused by these dangerous drugs.

The government will work with Yukon First Nations governments and the Government of Canada to fund a rural, on-the-land mental health and substance treatment centre.

These initiatives will support healthy, safe families throughout our territory.

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The Yukon continues to grow and reveal its endless possibilities.

Our population now exceeds 42,500 people.

People from across the country and around the world continue to see the Yukon as a place full of promise and adventure.

A place to raise a family.

A place to get an advanced education.

A place to reconnect with nature and explore the outdoors.

A place to embrace rich Indigenous cultures and learn from traditional ways of knowing and doing.

A place to start a business.

A place to enjoy unique and authentic experiences.

A place to experience an unparalleled quality of life and pursue your dreams.

To support a strong and prosperous future for the territory, the government will continue to take action to make the lives of Yukoners healthier, happier and more affordable.

Our COVID-19 support programs have allowed Yukon businesses to keep operating during the pandemic and kept the economy moving forward.

The Yukon was one of only two jurisdictions in Canada to experience GDP growth in 2020, despite the pandemic.

Your government is committed to carrying our economic momentum forward.

This year will see the launch of the Great Yukon Summer Campaign.

This innovative campaign will create incentives for Yukon tourism operators to offer Yukoner rates for tourism products and services through additional funding opportunities.

It will help Yukon businesses build marketing campaigns to maximize the attraction of Yukoners this summer, provide funding for Yukon organizations to hold local events, and support the new Mountain Music Festival together with the MacBride Museum.

Yukon's tourism sector is a vital part of our economy, providing good jobs across the territory and creating economic benefits in our communities.

The Great Yukon Summer Campaign will encourage Yukoners to explore the territory while supporting our extensive network of tourism operators.

It will help the tourism sector rebound stronger than ever while continued COVID-19 support programs ensure it will recover faster than any jurisdiction in Canada.

When the danger of the COVID-19 has passed, the Yukon will be one of the most exciting tourism destinations in the world.

The ongoing implementation of the Yukon Tourism Development Strategy will ensure tourism operators can seize the immense opportunities in the post-pandemic world.

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Our thriving mining sector is the backbone of the territory's economy.

Your government will continue to work with industry partners to ensure that the Yukon has a flourishing mineral resource sector that everyone can support.

By continuing to collaborate with major industry partners we can ensure they have local purchase programs to work with Yukon businesses wherever possible.

A new Mineral Exploration Fund will support junior mining companies operating in the Yukon search for the next major deposit.

Developing a policy for mining in municipalities that promotes sustainable development will ensure community values and plans are respected.

The recommendations of the independent Mineral Development Strategy will be carefully analyzed as government works in collaboration with partners to develop successor mining legislation and increase regulatory clarity.

Government will also continue to work with all partners on regulatory amendments to the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act to create a more streamlined assessment process.

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The coming years will bring enormous opportunities for innovation and expansion in the Yukon.

Everyone needs an opportunity to thrive and your government will continue to support workers and businesses while building capacity in our economy.

Yukon's minimum wage will be increased to \$15.20 per hour this year.

Government will create workforce development agreements to re-train workers and support the transition to a green economy.

A new immigration strategy will be created to support the increased workforce requirements of businesses and industry.

An Innovation Commission will be established to attract new technology start-ups and grow Yukon's digital ecosystem.

This will be complemented by an innovation strategy that will continue to expand opportunities for local entrepreneurs.

In partnership with the private sector, a flexible fieldhouse complex will be developed for athletics and large public conferences and events.

This will support Yukon's bid to host the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Canada Winter Games in 2027.

Hosting the Canada Winter Games presents an exciting opportunity to share our culture and community with the rest of Canada.

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Your government recognizes the climate crisis needs to be considered at the heart of all its decisions.

This is the only way we can guarantee a safe future for the next generation of Yukoners.

There will continue to be a moratorium on fracking in the Yukon.

Working together with Yukoners, the City of Whitehorse, the Kwanlin Dün First Nation, the Ta'an Kwäch'an Council, and Yukon University, your government will set aside land to permanently protect McIntyre Creek for present and future generations of Yukoners.

This area has tremendous historical, cultural, and academic importance.

The creation of McIntyre Creek Park will benefit all Yukoners and help slow biodiversity loss in the Yukon by protecting important wildlife areas.

Yukon's Wetland Strategy will be completed in the coming year to guide the management of activities in wetlands across the territory.

Working together with partners to complete the Dawson Land Use Planning process will be a priority.

Government will continue to implement Our Clean Future, Yukon's strategy for climate change, energy and a green economy.

The strategy will see reduced greenhouse gas emissions, less reliance on fossil fuels and significant investments in renewable energy.

To meet the urgent need to address the climate crisis, your government will amend its greenhouse gas emissions reduction target to a 45 per cent reduction by 2030, compared to 2010 emissions.

Plans to reach this more ambitious target will be developed by a newly established Yukon Climate Leadership Council.

The voice of youth is particularly important as we look to tackle climate change.

Government actions to address climate change will be informed by Yukon's Youth Panel on Climate Change to ensure the next generation has a voice in their future.

Including the perspectives of our youth will ensure Yukon's approach to addressing climate change is comprehensive and forward thinking.

Your government will take action to ensure the territory's transition to a green economy creates opportunities across the territory as we move towards a more clean and sustainable future.

The Yukon has one of the greenest energy systems in the country, and the government's vision is for the territory to be powered on 97 per cent renewable energy, even as our population and economy continue to grow.

To advance this vision, government will support the implementation of Yukon Energy's 10-year Renewable Electricity Plan.

This will see historic investments in several major energy projects including the construction of a new pumped storage facility at Moon Lake to store extra power not used in the summer so that it can be used in the winter.

In partnership with the Taku River Tlingit First Nation, the Atlin hydro plant will be expanded and connected to Yukon's grid, increasing our hydro capacity.

The transmission network in the Southern Lakes region will be expanded and upgraded to connect projects to the grid and allow for future sales opportunities with our neighbours in Skagway.

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As Yukon's economy continues to grow in a sustainable and responsible way, it is critical that all Yukoners are supported to live healthy, happy lives.

With the implementation of the Putting People First report underway, the Yukon is on track to become a healthcare leader in Canada.

Your government will continue to take action to make health and social services more integrated, collaborative and people-centred to better meet the needs of Yukoners.

A new bilingual health centre in Whitehorse will improve care for the Yukon's francophone population.

A new secure medical unit will be constructed at the Whitehorse General Hospital.

The way healthcare professionals are regulated will be improved and coverage will be increased to groups such as psychologists, optometrists and allied health professionals.

In partnership with First Nations, Yukon University and the Government of Canada, government will support Yukoners to pursue careers in health and social service program delivery.

Yukon's Aging-in-Place Strategy will continue to be implemented, increasing supportive housing for seniors and expanding the Home First program.

Your government will work in partnership with the federal government to support a Canada-wide universal pharmacare program model.

It will also take action to provide dental benefits to uninsured Yukoners.

The cost of birth control and fertility treatments will be subsidized along with the cost of period products for those in need.

Midwifery will continue to be integrated into Yukon's healthcare system, working towards a fully funded program later this year.

Your government will continue to provide funding for the new universal early childhood education program introduced last month.

This program subsidizes each licensed childcare space by \$700 per month, with additional subsidies for low-income families.

This is an historic investment in Yukon families, providing them with more disposable income and making their lives more affordable.

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Yukon's strong future requires an effective education system that supports all learners.

Your government is committed to improving education opportunities and outcomes for all Yukon students.

As the territory's population continues to grow, more classrooms are needed to educate the next generation of Yukoners.

A new elementary school will be built in Whistle Bend in the coming years as well as a new school in Burwash Landing.

Government will continue to work with the Yukon First Nations Chiefs Committee on Education and all Yukon First Nations to improve Yukon First Nations students' education outcomes.

In collaboration with First Nations partners, a Yukon First Nations school board will be created to ensure Yukon First Nations can meaningfully shape their children's education.

The Yukon is now home to the first University in Canada's North.

The government will support Yukon University's new science building and its inclusion of traditional knowledge.

It will also work with the University to investigate a varsity sports program.

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Every Yukoner should feel safe in their community.

Your government will keep working with partners to make all Yukon communities safer.

It will enhance our community safety planning program and ensure a consistent approach to funding community safety planning activities across the territory.

Working together with stakeholders and community partners, the Sexualized Assault Response Team program will continue to be enhanced and expanded to Yukon communities.

Your government will release an LGBTQ2S+ Action Plan to guide the Yukon's continuing shift towards a more inclusive and welcoming society.

A new program will be established to provide supportive community housing to Justice-involved women that is gender-responsive, culturally sensitive and trauma-informed.

This reflects the government's commitment to increasing community safety and justice through Yukon's MMIWG2S+ strategy.

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There is an urgent need to increase access to stable and affordable housing for Yukoners across the territory.

Your government has taken significant action over the past several years to meet the diverse housing needs of Yukoners.

The first ever Housing First residence in the North was opened in Whitehorse, providing safe, secure, low-barrier housing for the most vulnerable in our capital city.

Building on this success, the next Housing First project will be built in Watson Lake.

Working in partnership with the private sector and NGOs, the government has supported hundreds of new affordable housing units as well as major new supportive housing projects to increase options for Yukoners across the housing continuum.

The government will work with the private sector on developing the 5<sup>th</sup> and Rogers land parcel in Whitehorse while ensuring the project helps increase the amount of available housing, including rentals.

Together with the City of Whitehorse and the private sector, it will also look at relocating the grader station in the Marwell area of Whitehorse to allow for future development of housing.

During the previous mandate, your government tripled investment in lot development.

This trend will continue as the government plans to release 1000 new lots across the Yukon in the coming years.

Your government will also explore new models of providing housing that is affordable and accessible to Yukoners.

A land parcel grant will support the establishment of a Yukon Community Land Trust to allow for the creation of permanently affordable housing in Whitehorse.

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Yukon's future prosperity will be built through strong partnerships with First Nations.

Actively upholding and promoting the spirit and intent of the Self-Government Agreements is the foundation of these partnerships.

Genuine partnerships based on respect and cooperation will continue to generate benefits and positive outcomes for all Yukoners.

Your government will work with partners to implement Yukon's MMIWG2S+ Strategy to help our society heal and move forward together.

Engaging the Yukon Forum to advance priorities in critical areas such as health and social services, education, justice and heritage will allow government to continue to respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action.

Your government will continue to implement Breaking Trail Together, an innovative public service plan that will ensure government is inclusive and representative of the people it serves.

Yukon First Nations traditions and practices will also continue to be incorporated into this Assembly so that it better reflects the people it represents.

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The interests of Yukoners are best served by a modern government that is responsive to its needs.

Your government will keep working to make Yukon services and laws more open, inclusive, accessible and effective.

It will continue to modernize and update Yukon's legislative framework to ensure that it responds to current realities and does not discriminate based on gender identity, marital status or sexual orientation.

The government will consult with Yukoners about your vision for electoral reform and bring forward recommendations in the coming year.

It will introduce laws to make the Yukon a better place to live.

A modernized Motor Vehicles Act will improve safety for all road users.

A new Workplace Safety and Compensation Act will improve Yukon's workplace safety and compensation systems to ensure workers have the support they deserve.

A new Clean Energy Act will legislate Yukon's greenhouse gas reduction and renewable energy generation targets.

Single use plastics will be banned in the territory.

The Territorial Lands Act will be updated to help manage the use, maintenance, access and closure of resource roads.

Our Safer Communities and Neighbourhood Act will be enhanced to help target abuse, exploitation, the illegal use of firearms and criminal organizations in our territory.

Changes to the Child Care Act will enhance the delivery of the new universal early childhood education program.

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As we look to emerge from the challenges of the pandemic, there is much hope and opportunity on the horizon.

Your government remains committed to supporting Yukoners to live healthy, happy lives, building on the strong foundation established over the last five years.

The Yukon remains a place full of promise – a promise that can be realized through purpose and hard work.

The territory's swift, measured and comprehensive response to the COVID-19 pandemic has set an example for all Canadians.

Leading the country in vaccination rates has positioned the Yukon to lead the transition into a post-pandemic world.

**Speech from the Throne** May, 2021

It is time to move forward together on the path to recovery.

The nation's eyes are on the Yukon as we forge our next steps.

Honourable members, Yukoners do not expect you to agree on everything.

They do expect you share a common interest and a common responsibility in working towards a more prosperous future for the people of this territory, their families and their communities.

May this guide your deliberations and may you carry out your responsibilities with respect for each other and compassion and understanding for others.

Thank you.

Merci.

Mahsi' cho.

Gunałchîsh.

