



SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

Third Session of the 34th Yukon Legislative Assembly

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

October 3, 2019.



Honourable members, I want to begin by acknowledging that we come together today on the Traditional Territories of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council.

It is a privilege for me to speak in this Assembly, on the eve of the territory's 40th anniversary of responsible government.

As a new session begins, let us remember who brought us here – Yukoners from all walks of life and many different backgrounds who have helped our territory grow and succeed.

Sadly, on August 30th, we lost one such person.

Dennis Fentie was a proud advocate for Watson Lake for four terms in this House. As Yukon's longest-serving Premier, he had an immeasurable impact, passionately defending this territory on the national stage while he worked with equal passion and commitment for people at home.

Mr. Fentie will be remembered for his charismatic leadership and his strong belief in getting things done. We are indebted to him for his invaluable service and offer our sincere condolences to his family, friends and former colleagues.

Yukon has lost other valued members of our community recently as well. I want to acknowledge their important contribution to this rich and vibrant land.



I am grateful for the opportunity today to highlight the successes of many Yukoners and to speak to the strong foundation your government has built and the measures it will undertake to continue that success.

Yukon has much to celebrate. Our population has reached a modern-day record. 2019 has been a strong year for our tourism industry. A new mine, Victoria Gold, the largest gold mine in Yukon history, just poured its first gold bar.

The Town of Faro celebrated its 50th anniversary with many reunion activities this past summer. Five other Yukon municipalities are celebrating 35 years of incorporation in 2019: Watson Lake, Mayo, Teslin, Haines Junction and Carmacks.

Half the people serving in Yukon's municipal governments today are women, making our territory a national leader in representation of women in municipal politics.

Yukon First Nations are working diligently for their Citizens. They are showing Canada how self-government can advance self-reliance and build a better future for everyone. They are embarking on innovative projects to make a difference in their communities and throughout Yukon.

To mention just one example, the Tr'ondek Hwech'in partnered with Yukon College to create a farm capable of supplying fresh produce and other food staples in a sustainable way.

It won the Arctic Inspiration Prize last February – demonstrating the passion, creativity and innovation of our territory's people.

Your government is working to complete a new agriculture policy to support this industry and increase food self-sufficiency in Yukon.

Yukon is home to many exceptional individuals.

For instance, talented athletes like Stephanie Dixon who is leading Canada as chef de mission for the 2020 Paralympic Games in Tokyo.

And Ernest Chua who won a silver medal for Team Canada in the 100-metre backstroke at this summer's Special Olympics World Games.

Dylan Cozens became the first home-grown hockey prospect to be a top draft pick in the National Hockey League, earning the Buffalo Sabres about 40,000 new fans.

Hundreds of athletes from across the circumpolar North will come together next March as Whitehorse hosts the Arctic Winter Games. Our active, engaged volunteer community will put on an event we will all be proud of as these games mark their 50th anniversary.

Young Yukoners are stepping up as entrepreneurs. They are investing in the territory's future and succeeding.

Two young Yukoners are among many making names for themselves in the business world. Tanner and Myles Hougen have turned their Yukon-Built clothing line into full-time jobs. In doing so, they are following in the footsteps of their grandfather, Rolf Hougen.

This summer, the Hougen Group of Companies celebrated 75 years in businesses that have made great contributions to Yukon's economy.

Proof, a Yukon-based start-up that has developed a paperless approval system for government documents is one of two Canadian companies to earn a place in the "Pitch@Palace" Global Competition in London, England, later this year.

This dynamic start-up is just one of many Yukon companies advancing our growing knowledge economy and contributing to Whitehorse's reputation as a city where entrepreneurs thrive.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business ranked Whitehorse number one in the country for entrepreneurship last year.

To support the continued growth of Yukon's innovation and knowledge sector, your government is developing an innovation plan. It is also completing its review of economic funding programs to ensure these programs meet today's needs.

Yukon's art and culture sector continues to thrive.

The Dakhká Khwáan Dancers, an award-winning Inland Tlingit dance group, recently represented Canada at México's Indigenous Language Fair.

Break Out West, Western Canada's largest music industry event, is taking place in Whitehorse this week. This is an opportunity for Yukon artists to showcase their talents to a captive industry audience.

Yukon is well-known as a community of vibrant artistic and cultural expression. Your government is preparing a multi-year strategy to support, grow and encourage a flourishing creative and cultural industries sector.

Our francophone community is one of several communities enriching our territory's diversity through its unique culture and heritage.

Marie Bélanger, a Grade 5 teacher at École Émilie-Tremblay in Whitehorse, was one of 10 educators from across the country to be honoured with a Prime Minister's Award for Teaching Excellence.

Last year, Madame Justice Edith Campbell became the first woman and the first francophone to be a resident Yukon Supreme Court judge.

This government has significantly expanded services available to our francophone residents. There are now 73 designated bilingual positions across government, including a new bilingual victim service worker and a bilingual mental health counsellor.

Yukon is home to so many dedicated, innovative individuals. One way your government is highlighting people's achievements and excellence is through the newly created Order of Yukon.

The Order is the highest honour in Yukon. It will recognize individuals who have made exceptional contributions to our territory.

I will be presenting the first medals at the annual Commissioner's Levee this coming January 1st and I invite all Yukoners to join in this celebration.



Honourable members, your government is working hard to tackle the challenges of our time.

This government recognizes that there is a climate emergency. Yukoners have known this for many, many years.

Young people around the world are increasingly concerned about their future – and are speaking out about the need for change.

Young people here in Yukon deserve to have their voices heard. Your government will create a Youth Panel on Climate Change to provide advice and perspectives to policy makers here in the territory.

We know the climate is in crisis and the North is warming faster than the rest of the country.

This government recognizes that the need to act on climate change is urgent. This has been central to its work to date and will continue to be a driving factor.

It is part of the government's discussions at the Yukon Forum, with municipalities and with its sister territories and others as they take actions to mitigate the unique impacts of climate change in the North and adapt to this reality.

This is a transformational time.

In the coming weeks, this government will be engaging Yukoners in discussions on a climate change, energy and green economy strategy.

This 10-year strategy, being developed in partnership with Yukon First Nations and municipal governments, will set out ambitious targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and the actions needed to achieve them.

The strategy will increase the resiliency of our communities, adding to what the government is already doing to retrofit government buildings and support residential and commercial retrofits.

Next year, your government will introduce amendments to the *Assessment and Taxation Act* in this House to create an energy retrofit loan program, similar to the existing rural electrification and wells program.

Retrofitting our homes and commercial buildings will reduce heating demands, allow us to switch to renewables and foster new opportunities for a reliable green economy.

Through the Innovative Renewable Energy Initiative, now in its second full year, 1.5 million dollars is being invested annually in projects to reduce Yukon's reliance on fossil fuels for electricity and heat.

Multi-year renewable energy projects are now underway in Beaver Creek, Old Crow, Pelly Crossing, Burwash Landing, Destruction Bay, Teslin, Dawson City, Carcross and Whitehorse.

Last month, the government announced two new projects, both of which will help reduce Yukon's carbon footprint.

A new battery energy storage system will be built in Whitehorse for the Yukon Energy Corporation, creating a more reliable power supply and reducing Yukon Energy's reliance on fossil fuels.

The first stage of the Stewart to Keno transmission line project will involve replacing 31 kilometres of the Mayo-McQuesten section of the line. This will allow Victoria Gold's new mine to operate on hydro-generated electricity and have a positive impact on reliability and quality of service in the Mayo-Keno region.

These projects total a 60-million-dollar investment in green infrastructure.

Transportation presents a particular challenge in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, accounting for 62 per cent of Yukon's total emissions in 2016. With this in mind, your government will work to electrify the Alaska Highway, support more electric buses for the City of Whitehorse and increase the number of electric vehicles within its own fleet.

The climate change, energy and green economy strategy is central to your government's commitment to marry our economic goals with our environmental values.

Six weeks ago, the Peel Land Use Plan was signed. This plan will allow responsible land use, while protecting ecologically sensitive areas in the watershed. That same week, Victoria Gold received an amended water licence for its Eagle Gold project. Both of these significant events illustrate that, with a responsible, balanced approach, the economy and environment can both be priorities to make life better in our territory.

Using the same vision and balanced approach, your government will establish a co-lab – an open, creative process where a group of people work together to generate solutions to complex problems. The co-lab will focus on solving practical problems that integrate economic and environmental considerations to support sustainable development in Yukon.

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The people of this territory deeply value our vast wilderness – and your government is working collaboratively to protect the environment we treasure.

The celebration on the banks of the Stewart River in August, where after 15 years all parties approved the Peel Watershed Regional Land Use Plan, bears witness to this commitment.

It marks a significant milestone for land use planning, for wilderness protection in Yukon – and for reconciliation.

It is a significant milestone for Yukon – but also for Canada and the world. It is a leading example of what can be achieved when people work together and listen to each other.

To continue its work to protect the environment, your government will address the impacts of off-road vehicles by developing an effective regulatory regime.

Off-road vehicles are widely used and responsibly enjoyed by most Yukoners. Any regulations must reflect this reality, while ensuring our wilderness is protected.

The first step will be to designate sensitive ecological areas where, to protect them, off-road vehicles will not be permitted.

Your government will continue to engage in discussions with Yukoners about further regulation.

Yukoners enjoy being out on the land. This government is now seeking the public's views to help with the planning for Yukon parks and campgrounds.

In June, the government opened a new wheelchair accessible interpretive trail at the Wolf Creek campground, the second such trail in the territory.

Tān Tágà Shro, or “trail (to the) big river,” was developed collaboratively by the Yukon government, the Kwänlin Dün First Nation, the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council and the City of Whitehorse. The trail features interpretive signs in English, French and Southern Tutchone – the first of its kind in Yukon territorial parks.

This trail is a reminder of the traditional knowledge that guides the Yukon way of life.

Our wildlife populations are important to Yukoners. In addition to ensuring wildlife remains healthy and well-managed, work is underway to develop Yukon legislation on protecting species at risk.

Conservation plays an important role in protecting Yukon's environment, but we must also pay attention to all impacts of human activity.

Your government is now working with municipal governments to create a territory-wide regional waste management system and to improve recycling.

Based on the input from Yukoners, your government is also taking a necessary step to reduce and curb pollution; it will be implementing a ban on single use bags.

These steps are part of our collective work to protect this beautiful place that we call home.



Yukon's economy is thriving, and Yukoners are coming home.

Our territory has the lowest unemployment rate and the highest workforce participation rate in Canada. Canadians are starting to notice this special place that is full of opportunities.

The new Victoria Gold mine is just the first of several expected to go into production in coming years, fuelling Yukon's economy. In June 2019, 69 per cent of the mine's employees were Yukon residents, with 37 per cent of their employees being First Nations. This success is evidence of how mines can be built through strong relationships with local communities and bring jobs and benefits for Yukon people.

To ensure that our mineral industry is as effective and modern as possible, your government recently launched the development of a Mineral Development Strategy for the territory. An independent panel of experts will provide advice to ensure a balanced strategy that represents the voices of all Yukoners.

Yukon's economy is thriving in many ways. Our tourism industry is booming.

The Yukon Tourism Development Strategy provides a clear 10-year vision to guide the growth of a vibrant, sustainable industry. Now is the time for action.

The Governance Task Force has finished its work on examining what governance model would best achieve the vision, goals and values of the strategy.

Based on the task force's recommendations, your government will be creating a new body to advise the Minister on implementing the strategy and achieving its goals.

Your government encourages tourists to visit Yukon and also encourages people to come and join the workforce.

A new agreement with the federal government is providing more funds and flexibility to meet the needs of our local labour market. Your government recently signed a letter of intent with the Republic of the Philippines to help Filipino workers find opportunities here.

New procurement rules are providing more opportunities for Yukon's business community – with better access to contracting opportunities and more consistency and flexibility in sourcing goods and services.

With several licences approved for cannabis stores, your government is fulfilling its commitment to foster a growing, healthy private sector that combats the illicit market. It is closing its own store in two weeks, leaving the retail market to the private sector.

In its first budget, your government reduced taxes for both large and small businesses. As a result, Yukon corporations are seeing an overall reduction of approximately 3.2 million dollars annually in their tax bills.

Amendments that improve the current Small Business Investment Tax Credit will be introduced in this House next year, and further tax measures to support Yukon businesses are under development.



Yukon's economy is growing and modern infrastructure is needed to support it.

The Dawson airport runway is now paved. Your government continues to upgrade the Mayo aerodrome to better accommodate increased activity in that region, taking steps towards establishing it as a full airport.

Work is almost complete on replacing the Nares Bridge in Carcross, a key project involving local procurement and a partnership with the Carcross/Tagish First Nation. The next bridge to be refurbished is in Teslin.

Close to 160 million dollars of upgrades will begin next year on the North Klondike Highway, improving an important artery through Yukon, for communities and visitors alike.

Engineering work on the Carmacks Bypass road project is underway – the first project under the Resource Gateway partnership with the federal government.

These and other investments, guided by the five-year capital plan, define this government's approach to infrastructure development in rural Yukon – all communities matter.

From the footbridge in Ross River, to tiny houses in Haines Junction and the planned refurbishing of the administration building in Watson Lake, strategic investments are building healthy, vibrant, sustainable communities.

Your government has heard loud and clear the demand for more housing, and it has acted. There has been more investment in lot development across Yukon in the last two years than in the previous four. This year the government released many smaller lots, supporting affordable housing.

Over the last two years, your government has supported 21 rental and homeownership projects through the Housing Initiatives Fund. These projects are anticipated to provide 150 new affordable places to live for Yukoners.

Yukon's inaugural Housing First project will open its doors this fall to house the most vulnerable.

Your government is working hard to ensure housing for Yukoners from all walks of life.



Fundamental to giving everyone the best opportunity is education. Your government is committed to improving educational outcomes of our young people.

Our Department of Education exists for one reason – to support the lifelong learning of Yukon students. Acting in the best interests of students is the goal against which all actions must be measured.

A key priority for the Department of Education is supporting each and every school, and every student's learning.

Your government is working to increase First Nations' involvement in education and schools. Discussions through the Yukon Forum, negotiation of a framework agreement with the Chiefs' Committee on Education, renewed efforts and funding to implement the Joint Education Action Plan, and the recent hiring of an Assistant Deputy Minister of First Nations Initiatives are all part of this commitment.

The Yukon government now has education agreements with the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, Selkirk First Nation, Kluane First Nation, and the Kwanlin Dün First Nation. These agreements, and others we want to sign, will allow First Nations governments to set *their* priorities for *their* children in the schools they attend. Funding has now been dedicated to implement these agreements.

We are embedding Yukon First Nations ways of knowing, doing and being, as well as First Nation history, culture and languages, in the school curriculum at every grade level.

Your government is working to establish high quality early learning environments in all rural Yukon communities. It is now working with the Kluane First Nation and the Ross River Dena Council to plan schools that will meet their needs.

To support young children in being ready to learn, and to help families get there, students in most rural schools have the option to start kindergarten when they are four years old instead of when they are five.

Your government recognizes the positive impact that early learning supports have on children and families. It will make early kindergarten available in every single rural school, as it investigates the future implementation of this program in Whitehorse.

In partnership with the Commission Scolaire Francophone du Yukon, a new French first language secondary school is as I speak being constructed by a local company.

Other new schools are being planned, including the first elementary school to be built in 27 years in Whitehorse.

During this sitting, your government will introduce new legislation to establish Yukon University, the first university in Canada's North. In the North, by the North, for the North.

This is a bold move, but one that Yukon College has been building towards for several years. Its enrolment has grown steadily – up 50 per cent since 2015.

The first graduates of its first made-in-Yukon bachelor program in Indigenous governance will receive their degrees next May as Yukon University becomes a reality.

The proposed bill will set clear objectives for university governance and provide for a range of post-secondary programs giving Yukon students opportunities to further their education right here in the North.



During this sitting, your government will introduce amendments to the Corrections Act to reform the use of segregation at the Whitehorse Correctional Centre. These changes are part of ongoing work to improve the correctional centre, as recommended by the inspection report on the facility and recent case law.

Other initiatives underway include better support for individuals with mental health needs at the correctional centre and increasing culturally relevant programming and supports for Indigenous inmates.

The RCMP's Historical Case Unit has been funded for a three-year period with a mandate to investigate historical homicides, historical suspicious deaths and missing persons. This vital unit has already seen success, resulting in charges in some historical cases.

Your government is committed to advancing the use of restorative justice and supporting the growth of community-based programming.

It is working with communities on community safety plans that build on existing partnerships and successes with the Kwanlin Dün and Selkirk First Nations.

Across the country, governments are changing labour laws to give victims of family or domestic violence additional leave to get the help they need. We are committed to making those same provisions available here in Yukon.

This is part of your government's commitment to building safer communities by increasing its efforts to reduce violence against women and to work collaboratively with community partners.

Yukon played an exceptional role in the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls by attending national and regional events. The Chief Commissioner applauded Yukon's participation, which she said showed "brilliant leadership" throughout the inquiry.

Now that the inquiry has issued its calls for justice, your government will work with the Yukon Advisory Committee to respond through the creation of a territory-wide action plan documenting its work to date and commitments for change.

Since coming to office in late 2016, this government has made several changes to legislation, policies and practices to support a diverse, inclusive society that promotes LGBTQ2S+ rights, equality and freedom from discrimination.

Its decision to offer the World Professional Association for Transgender Health education and training course this past summer is a prime example – 97 practitioners participated in this important training opportunity.

Further changes will be made based on the government's consultation with this community. This includes banning conversion therapy.



This government also supports Yukoners by ensuring timely access to primary health care – a key priority of this government.

The recent decision to provide a nurse practitioner in the community of Mayo is an example of how your government is working to fulfill this goal.

Health care needs are changing in the territory and the government must adapt. The comprehensive review of Yukon's healthcare system will help it do so.

The review, combined with the Aging in Place action plan now in its final stages, will ensure your government is addressing the needs of seniors today and into the future.

Better data allows the government to analyze trends and make informed decisions for Yukoners, based on the realities on the ground in Yukon and across Canada.

For example, hospital wait times and length of stays in the hospital are trending downwards. This is in part due to the successes we are seeing at Whistle Bend Place, whose dedicated staff recently received the Premier's Award for Excellence and Innovation.

Funding for Yukon Home Care has increased by 1.5 million dollars in the past two years. This has resulted in more than 1,225 clients receiving services, an increase of 20 per cent from the previous year. More than a third of these were Yukoners living in communities outside Whitehorse.

This government remains committed to reducing the number of children in the care of Family and Children Services, and it is making progress. There has been a 30 per cent reduction in the number of children in care since 2016.

When older children go into care, many will be welcomed at a supportive housing and semi-independent living program on Wann Road in Whitehorse that opens this fall.

Your government believes in making key investments in newborn and women's health. That is why new midwifery regulations are nearing completion, and the government is developing models of care based on best practices elsewhere and on feedback from stakeholders and members of the Yukon public.

The creation of mental wellness hubs, the hiring of new mental health professionals in rural Yukon and the recent revitalization of local counselling services are concrete steps this government has taken to improve mental health care services.

Mental wellness hubs are an innovative solution to rural healthcare. To date, the hubs have hired 22 people, including counsellors, a mental health nurse and support workers – all in rural Yukon, with more hiring underway.

On the national level, your government is working with the Government of Saskatchewan to host a Canadian symposium on mental health in 2020.



Governments work best when they engage in a positive way with all their counterparts to find the best solutions for all citizens.

Your government remains focused on reconciliation with Yukon First Nations Peoples.

The primary instrument to foster reconciliation is the Yukon Forum. These meetings of Ministers and First Nations Chiefs have occurred quarterly since late 2016.

The Forum has produced a new agreement on resource royalties that settled a long-standing dispute.

It has approved a Memorandum of Understanding that lays the foundation for work towards a clear process for managing our cultural heritage, including archaeological and paleontological discoveries, cultural artifacts, and the stewardship of heritage and historic sites.

At its recent meeting, the Forum endorsed a new representative public service plan, “Breaking Trail Together, An Inclusive Yukon Public Service.”

A Joint Senior Executive Committee, made up of Deputy Ministers and First Nations Executive Directors, is meeting regularly to support the work of the Yukon Forum and its 16 working groups.

Successes in creating trust through the Yukon Forum have allowed governments to work together jointly in preparation for events such as Yukon Days in Ottawa, where they have achieved significant milestones with their federal counterparts.

These include treaty loan forgiveness, raising the importance of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to the health of the Porcupine Caribou Herd, and creating more awareness of self-governing First Nations processes and priorities.

This collaborative approach to intergovernmental relations has ensured flexibility on infrastructure dollars and major funding streams such as the Arctic Energy Fund and the Gateway Project.

This approach has also advanced work with Alaska on the future of the Port of Skagway and reinstating Shakwak highway funding. A bill that would accomplish this is now under consideration in the US Congress.

This fall during a tour of Yukon communities, the Premier and Minister of Community Services participated in several productive joint meetings with municipalities and First Nations governments.



Yukoners have a right to know what their government is doing. This government is committed to being transparent and open about its decision making.

A single open data portal now gives Yukoners ready access to scientific, statistical and other government data.

Regulations are being developed to implement the new *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act* that will better protect Yukoners' personal information and increase government transparency.

Our one-government approach led to the successful implementation of cannabis legalization and a carbon pricing rebate that is returning revenues to Yukon households, businesses, and First Nations and municipal governments.

Government is most effective when it talks to Yukoners before decisions are made. Since 2017 more than 65 public engagements have been completed.

Since coming into office, Ministers have completed more than 125 community visits per year – at an average of one visit every three days.

Your government will continue to engage with Yukoners. It is obvious what can be achieved when we take time to listen and work together.

Your government also believes in reporting to Yukoners on progress. In the coming weeks, it will issue its third performance plan – so Yukoners can see what work is being accomplished, what the plans are for the future and where your government needs to further focus its efforts.

A project with the University of Waterloo to refine the Canadian Index of Wellbeing to make its indicators meaningful to Yukon circumstances is advancing, and new data will be included in the next performance plan.

Any government exists solely to serve its citizens and must keep that in mind with every action it takes. Being as open and transparent as possible is your government's way of ensuring that it remains accountable to Yukon citizens.



In addition to the bills I have already mentioned, this sitting your government will introduce a modern *Liquor Act* to balance business and consumer needs with measures to reduce alcohol-related harm, promote social responsibility and improve compliance.

As well, members will be asked to consider legislation to regulate and control vaping and e-cigarettes, and amendments to the *Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act* so it will apply to contraventions of both federal and Yukon legislation governing cannabis.

Changes to the *Elections Act* dealing with the permanent registry of voters and special ballots will also be introduced.

Supplementary budget estimates will be tabled to deal with unexpected expenditures, principally those related to wildland fire.

Yukon's changing climate has resulted in the heaviest wildfire season in 15 years. Fires across the territory kept crews very busy this summer and also into the fall, with the evacuation of the Ethel Lake area in mid-September. We owe our fire crews a debt of gratitude for their skill and dedication to keeping Yukon communities safe.

During the remainder of its mandate, this government will introduce legislation that overhauls the *Motor Vehicles Act*, modernizes our animal protection regime and reforms the *Workers' Compensation Act*.

These bills will build on your government's record of progressive legislation. Modernizing statutes, such as the *Legal Profession Act* and the *Coroners Act*, or legislating in new areas, such as the *Missing Persons Act*, ensures Yukon laws respond to current realities and codify best practices and procedures.



In closing, I want to return to the 40th anniversary of responsible government, which we will celebrate this fall.

The achievement of this important step in the territory's political development – a wholly elected Cabinet accountable to this House – took the efforts of many people advocating for progress over many years.

One of these people was the late Jim Smith. In recognition of his place in the story of responsible government and his many contributions over 10 years as Yukon Commissioner, the government is naming its main administration building here in Whitehorse the Jim Smith Building in his honour.

Honourable members, you have inherited the legacy of those who have gone before you in achieving responsible government, in supporting Yukon First Nations in realizing self-government and in building a diverse territory full of people with promise and hopes for the future.

They and all of you share a love of this special place.

As you undertake your work, remember the wisdom and generosity of those who preceded you and the responsibility to work for the people of this territory – to make their lives better.

May respect, fairness and compassion for others guide your deliberations.

Thank you. Merci. Mahsi. Gunalchish.

