



MAKING YUKONERS' LIVES BETTER

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

Second Session of the Thirty-fourth Yukon Legislative Assembly

Delivered by Commissioner Doug Phillips

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Mr. Speaker, honourable members, friends, people of Yukon:

I have the honour this afternoon to open a new legislative session – and a new approach to governing.

First, I want to acknowledge that we come together today on the traditional territory of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Ta’an Kwäch’än Council.

Yukon owes much to the rich and enduring history of its first peoples.

For millennia, First Nations people have lived on this land.

Its abundance has sustained them for generations.

Their customs and culture draw from their connections to the land and its creatures – and define their heritage.

Others have come to Yukon – whether lured by a sense of adventure or new opportunities – or simply for a better life.

They have put down roots, raised their families and looked after their grandchildren.

Yukon people have embraced this beautiful land – with its majestic mountains, its wild spaces and its wealth of natural resources.

It inspires artists.

It challenges outdoor enthusiasts.

It generates economic wealth.

Honourable members, Yukoners are generous and resilient people.

They want for others what they want for themselves.

Clean air to breathe and clean water to drink.

Respectful relationships – and equality – among people.

Good jobs.

Yukoners want to lead healthy, happy, productive lives. They want the same for their children and grandchildren.

They want to live in vibrant communities – and shape the direction of their communities.

Yukoners want their government to serve them.



Your new government is working diligently every day to do just that – to serve Yukon people and serve them well.

Yukoners deserve no less.

Your new government has set a course for the future.

Your government is committed to improving the well-being of Yukoners.

It knows all communities matter.

It believes strong government-to-government relationships with First Nations benefit Yukon as a whole.

Your new government is committed to a stronger economy.

It recognizes Yukoners want good jobs – and new business opportunities.

They want an economy that respects the environment – and the natural gifts of this land.

Yukoners also want good government – government that is approachable, transparent and accountable.

Working with Yukon people, your new government will make their lives better.

It will do so through these commitments:

- Your new government's approach to wellness – centred on people – will help Yukoners thrive.
- The strategic investments your government makes will contribute to healthy, vibrant, sustainable communities.
- Strong government-to-government relationships will foster reconciliation.
- Your new government's commitment to a diverse, growing economy will provide good jobs for Yukoners in an environmentally-responsible way.

These priorities will drive the government's agenda for the coming five years.

Your new government will work with the people of Yukon to achieve them.

In doing so, it will base its decisions on evidence.

It will manage the territory's financial resources prudently.

It will speak forthrightly for Yukon's interests beyond its borders – and on the national stage.



It will measure the progress it makes – and report on that progress.

Your new government will deliver on its fundamental responsibility – to make the lives of Yukon people and their families better.

HEALTHY, HAPPY PEOPLE

Your new government is committed to a people-centred approach to wellness that helps Yukoners thrive.

Its programs and services will support the well-being of Yukoners – from our infants to elders.

Every child deserves to have the best start in life.

Your government believes in making investments in newborn health.

Midwifery can – and should be – a safe and supported childbirth option in Yukon.

Your new government has already started work on regulating and incorporating midwives into the Yukon health care system.

Working with midwives, doctors and other medical professionals, the government anticipates licensing the practice of midwifery later next year.

Yukoners want the best for their children – the best chance at a healthy, happy life.

Your government does, too.

It will increase investments in early learning opportunities to support children's readiness for school.

It will invest in more quality child care to support families – and help make their lives better.

Every child deserves a home where they are supported, nurtured and safe.

Your government will work with families and communities and First Nations to help ensure every child has a secure childhood – and a promising future.

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Your government believes that Yukon students deserve a high-quality education:

An education that gives them the tools to achieve their full potential – and their dreams.

Your new government is investing in Yukon classrooms.

It is working with les Franco-Yukonnais and the broader community to build a new school in Whitehorse.

Over the next four years, the curriculum in Yukon schools will be transformed, with a focus on skills development and experiential learning.

Through the new curriculum, your government will ensure Yukon students to have the skills they need to succeed in the workplace – and in life.

It will improve the outcomes for all students, regardless of where they go to school.

At the post-secondary level, your new government will invest in the trades and skills and career training at Yukon College, tailored to the job market of today – and tomorrow.

At the same time, it will work with the College on its path to becoming a university, giving Yukoners more options to earn post-secondary degrees here at home.

Outside the classroom, your new government is making a greater investment this year in programs for our young people and the youth groups that deliver them.

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Every Yukoner deserves public health care that meets their needs.

Your new government wants every Yukoner to have a primary health care provider:

Whether that is a doctor, a nurse practitioner or a nurse working in an expanded role.

It wants a health care system built on a collaborative care model – a model that responds to community needs.

It wants more health services delivered in our communities, including services for people who struggle with addictions and mental health issues.

With this in mind, it negotiated more than 11-million dollars in new federal contributions for home care and mental health initiatives in its first month in office.

Your government will use these new funds to make lives better for Yukon people.



It will invest in mental health services in communities throughout Yukon and in addiction services at the new Sarah Steele treatment facility in Whitehorse.

It will also expand its support for land-based healing – and home care.

It will enhance services in French with a strong focus on health, based on priorities identified by the Francophone community.

Your government will complete a 150-bed facility for continuing care patients in Whistle Bend, while exploring other options for our seniors to age in place.

It is true governments can build buildings.

But government is about more than bricks and mortar.

It's about programs and services that respond to people's needs – and make their lives better.

Next month, the inquiry into Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women and Girls begins its national hearings here in Whitehorse.

Your new government is an active participant.

Working with community partners and First Nations, it is developing Yukon solutions to help reduce violence against Aboriginal women.

This is part of your government's overall effort to reduce incidents of relationship violence and sexual assault, which are still too high in Yukon.

Your government will take a balanced approach in its justice system.

It will protect Yukoners and respond to victims' needs, while providing rehabilitation that reduces recidivism and addresses issues that lead to incarceration.

Your new government supports inclusiveness, equality and a respect for diversity in its programming and services.

During this sitting, your government will introduce legislation to amend the *Human Rights Act* to eliminate discrimination on the basis of gender identify or gender expression.

This legislation will include changes to the *Vital Statistics Act* that will make it one of the most progressive laws in the country.

These measures are the first step in a larger review of Yukon laws, policies and practices.



Your government will respect the rights of lesbian, gay, transgender, bisexual, queer and two-spirit Yukoners – and their ability to lead safe, healthy, happy lives as they choose.

This is long overdue.

HEALTHY, VIBRANT, SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

Your new government will make strategic investments in healthy, vibrant, sustainable communities.

Communities are the lifeblood of our territory.

Municipalities and First Nations are key partners in governance – and in the future of Yukon.

Whether you live in Mayo or Carmacks, or Haines Junction or Teslin, you need to know that our governments are working together – and working for you.

Your government believes in local solutions to local concerns – to make life better for Yukon people throughout the territory.

Communities must have a meaningful voice in determining – and building – their future.

Next month, members of Cabinet will attend the annual general meeting of the Association of Yukon Communities in Faro.

Discussions on priorities for municipal governments will build on conversations members of Cabinet have had with communities and First Nations in recent months.

Your new government will build roads, bridges and other infrastructure to improve the quality of life in communities.

Key priorities for the coming year include clean water and waste water projects and improvements to solid waste management, diversion and recycling.

As more details are known about new federal infrastructure programs, your government will involve communities and First Nations in setting priorities for active living, sustainability and local economic growth.

Your government will also use new federal funding to invest wisely in more affordable, accessible and safe housing across Yukon.

This includes exploring a Housing First model to address the needs of our more vulnerable people.

It will take a new, more effective approach to how staff and social housing are provided in communities.



It will engage the private sector in partnerships to develop new ways of delivering these programs that support the economic development of communities.

Part of your government's job in building vibrant communities is helping them define the economic future they want, based on their interests and advantages.

This leads to local jobs.

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Your government believes that we all have a role to play in reducing the impacts of climate change.

Our goal is to eliminate diesel as a primary source of energy in Yukon.

Getting there will not be easy.

But we need to start investing now in this necessary transition.

Your government will focus on smaller renewable energy investments, with projects driven by First Nations and communities.

It will initiate pilot projects into the potential for electrical energy storage.

These can both reduce the use of fossil fuels and extend the viability of renewables.

At the same time, we must lower our energy use.

Your government will make significant investments in energy retrofits in its buildings, while supporting programs for retrofitting residential and commercial buildings.

Climate change poses risks to our northern way of life.

These challenges require good information on emissions to plan actions and guide investments – and to establish effective targets to both reduce greenhouse gases and grow the green economy.

Your new government will do this work.

Our longer winters and colder temperatures challenge us in reducing our use of non-renewable energy sources.

It will take time to develop alternative forms of energy.

This is why your government is committed to using any money raised through a federal price on carbon for rebates to Yukon individuals and businesses.



It will be revenue neutral.

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Our communities need to be connected to each other – and to the rest of Canada and the world.

Your government is committed to enhancing connectivity and bandwidth for all Yukon communities – and beyond.

It is now undertaking a thorough review of the two potential routes for a redundant fibre optic line to strengthen Yukon's internet connection to the outside.

Your government will make a decision based on the evidence of what is best for Yukon people.

Technology can help make Yukoners' lives better in our communities.

E-services give ready access to government programs and services throughout Yukon.

This year, your government will expand E-health services and the online corporate registry.

It will plan for more E-services to make it easier for people to take advantage of programs and services – and meet their needs, wherever they live in the territory.

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Yukoners live with wilderness on the doorstep.

Being outdoors, hiking, fishing and biking contribute to healthy lifestyles.

Your government will improve campground infrastructure to enable Yukoners to enjoy the natural world that surrounds us.

It will work with communities on their ideas for enhancing recreational opportunities.

This year, Yukoners will join Canadians across the country in commemorating the 150th anniversary of Confederation.

Canada 150 allows us an occasion to reflect on our unique identity in the North – and on our sense of what it means to be Canadian.

It gives us an opportunity to recognize the enduring history of First Nations people – to acknowledge Indigenous culture and languages and their contribution to the social fabric of a modern Yukon.

As Canadians, we have much to celebrate – including our willingness to address the wrongs of the past – and to work together for a more promising future for all.



Over the course of this year, Yukoners will also recognize the 75th anniversary of the construction of the Alaska Highway.

Your government will support community events for both anniversaries from Watson Lake to Beaver Creek – from Tagish to Old Crow.

STRONG GOVERNMENT-TO-GOVERNMENT RELATIONSHIPS

Honourable members, your new government believes in reconciliation with First Nations:

Reconciliation built on mutual understanding and respect.

Reconciliation based on a constructive relationship that contributes to good governance and benefits all Yukoners.

In January of this year, just one month after being sworn in, the members of the Cabinet and Chiefs of Yukon First Nations signed an intergovernmental declaration.

It sets the foundation for a renewed relationship based on reconciliation and collaboration.

Next month, your new government will meet with First Nation leaders from across the territory for the second Yukon Forum since coming to office.

A ceremonial potlatch bowl presented by the Grand Chief at the January Forum will sit on the meeting table, as a symbol of the mutual pledge to work together for a stronger Yukon.

Working together makes sense.

This year's Yukon Days, held in Ottawa in February, were built on a collaborative approach.

Together, members of Cabinet and Yukon Chiefs met with federal Ministers to advocate for programs, services and funding that respond to Yukon needs.

There is strength in a united voice.

It is an example for the rest of Canada.

Yukon First Nations lead the country in self-governance.



Yet there is more to do to fully realize the spirit and intent of final and self-government agreements.

It will involve hard work – and, sometimes, difficult conversations.

Your new government is committed to this effort.

It will work towards reconciliation with all Yukon First Nations and with transboundary First Nations with traditional territories in Yukon.

Working together, Yukon will build a more cohesive society, protect our environment and grow a sustainable economy.

As one of its very first priorities, your new government is acting on its promise to make National Aboriginal Day a statutory holiday in Yukon.

It will bring this legislative proposal to the House as its first bill.

On June 21st, Yukoners will celebrate the historic and cultural roots of this territory.

They will honour and recognize the many contributions First Nations and their citizens have made – and continue to make – to our unique way of life.

Honourable members, reconciliation will help Yukon progress.

Together today we can build a bright future for all – tomorrow.

GOOD JOBS FROM A DIVERSE, GROWING ECONOMY

Your new government is committed to helping strengthen and diversify Yukon's economy.

It will encourage all companies to hire Yukoners.

It will work with Yukon College to align training programs with market demands.

That will mean more Yukoners on the ground to work on projects in our territory.

It will encourage business partnerships.



Yukon's airline, Air North, is a prime example of how a partnership between an existing business and a First Nation development corporation can grow our economy:

Creating more jobs.

Expanding Yukon's reach beyond our borders.

And, making lives better for Yukon people.

The new free trade agreement – signed recently with Canada and provincial and territorial governments – will make it easier for other Yukon businesses to expand outside the territory.

It will open up new markets for Yukon products, while retaining safeguards for local needs.

Improvements in how government procures goods and services can support new opportunities for business and First Nation development corporations.

It can create the conditions that enable new private sector jobs for Yukoners.

Your new government will tender its major summer construction contracts by the end of March next year.

That just makes good business sense.

It will change the procurement process within the next 12 months to spell out advantages for using local companies, local people and local materials.

Your new government believes the economy and the environment go hand in hand.

It believes in responsible resource development.

Already, there are positive signs for the mineral sector.

Early in its mandate, the government approved amendments to Minto Explorations' quartz mining licence.

This will extend mining for its operation near Pelly Crossing until later this year.

Victoria Gold is moving forward with its plans to mine in the Dublin Gulch area, and there are positive developments for Alexco in the Keno Hills region.

Two projects – Kudz Ze Kayah and Coffee Creek – have recently entered Yukon's environmental and socioeconomic assessment process.



Just last week, Barrick Gold announced it is investing more than eight million dollars in ATAC Resources' property, east of Keno City.

That means half of the world's top 10 gold producers have a stake in Yukon.

This bodes well for mining here in the territory.

Your government knows support for mineral exploration is paying off.

It is increasing assistance this year.

It has committed to improving resource roads to placer operations in the Klondike region over the next three years.

The mining industry recognizes that certainty is a key ingredient of a prosperous future.

Your new government, Yukon First Nations and the Chamber of Mines have united in their efforts to restore confidence in the territory's development assessment process.

By working together with other governments and industry, more benefits can accrue to Yukon from our mining industry.

More good, well-paying jobs.

More opportunities for business and for First Nation development corporations.

More capacity to grow our economy.

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Your new government is working just as hard to support other sectors of the economy, as it is for the mining industry.

Every year, Yukoners welcome thousands of visitors to our beautiful territory.

They come to experience our spectacular landscapes, our rich culture and heritage, and the warmth of our hospitality.

Yet tourism is a highly competitive sector.

Your new government believes there's a need to take a longer-term view – and a more strategic focus – to grow Yukon tourism.

To this end, it will engage Yukon partners, communities and First Nations in developing a broad strategy to drive growth and make sure Yukon is a destination of choice.



Marketing funds targeted directly at travellers will become a permanent feature of our efforts to attract visitors to Yukon.

More will also be done to develop winter tourism.

A summit later this year will define opportunities and investments for sustained growth of this market.

To help tourism businesses better understand the interests and expectations of visitors, your government will initiate a comprehensive visitor survey this year.

Yukon's vibrant arts community and unique heritage can enrich visitors' experience, just as they enrich our lives.

Planning will begin this year on how best to give Yukoners and our visitors opportunities to view the many discoveries made over the years in the fossil-rich Klondike gold fields.

This year, your government is funding the cultural centre component in the new learning centre built by the Carcross/Tagish First Nation.

And, it will begin implementing the plan to jointly manage the Conrad Historic Site with this First Nation.

To enhance growth in Yukon's cultural industries, the government will start discussions this year on a broad-based arts and culture policy.

Our agriculture industry can support greater self-sufficiency, reducing Yukon's dependence on food imports.

The government will work towards a renewed agreement with the federal government this year to build on initiatives of Yukon farmers and agricultural producers.

More local food will provide Yukoners with more variety and healthier choices for their well-being.

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Yukoners are as innovative as they are adventurous.

They are good at figuring out how to solve northern problems with northern solutions.

Your new government believes in growing Yukon's knowledge economy.

Building the innovation, science and research, and IT sectors will strengthen Yukon's economic base.

Over the coming year, the government will lay the groundwork for a new multi-million dollar fund to invest in economic diversification and innovation.



It has already made changes to programs for film development and production, giving Yukon media producers access to financial assistance – and greater access to national funding sources.

The expansion of government E-services will be designed to create opportunities for local businesses, while benefitting citizens.

Development of an open data repository will begin this year to give entrepreneurs access to a wealth of research and the ability to use data in innovative ways.

Research, using science and traditional knowledge, will point to new ways to marry economic objectives with good stewardship of our environment, because Yukoners want both.

They want to earn a good living.

They want new economic prospects.

They also value a healthy environment – and the ability to use their leisure time to hike, fish, hunt and enjoy our wilderness.

Both are fundamental to the Yukon way of life and the well-being of our communities.

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Honourable members, your new government has been working hard – working with Yukoners to make their lives better.

Its collaborative approach with other governments has set a positive, new tone.

It has engaged with Yukon First Nations in a renewed relationship, founded on respect and a mutual interest in partnering for the betterment of Yukon.

The joint approach Ministers and Chiefs took to Ottawa for Yukon Days has shown others what can be achieved through collaboration.

Your government's work with Ottawa has led to significant investments for Yukoners in the recent federal budget.

For health care.

For homecare.

For mental health care.

And, for affordable housing.

There are other opportunities on the horizon.



Your government will maximize its efforts to ensure federal dollars and opportunities find their way to Yukon.

It has worked with First Nations and the mining industry to support new opportunities for resource development.

It has concluded a new free trade deal with other Canadian jurisdictions – with new prospects for Yukon businesses, while protecting local interests.

It has signed a pan-Canadian accord to address and adapt to the impacts of climate change – and support the shift to a cleaner, renewable economy.

It has launched a new curriculum in Yukon schools to lay the foundation for our future workforce – and our future leaders.

Members of Cabinet have been in communities across Yukon to help with today's concerns and to listen to their plans for tomorrow.

But this is just the beginning.

There is much more to do.

Your new government has a clear sense of purpose and is tackling that work – now.

It will continue to do so – to make the lives of Yukon people – and the lives of their families and their communities – better.

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Your government recognizes it's not just what it does that's important.

It's equally important how it does it.

Yukoners have a right to be heard.

Your new government will listen.

It will involve people in conversations to shape the decisions that affect them.

This is the heart of good governance.

Your new government believes in working with Yukon people.

It knows decisions that respond to people's needs and desires are the best decisions.

It will collaborate with others who have a stake in healthy communities and people, in a stronger economy and in the stewardship of our environment.



Your new government will be approachable and open in its dealings with Yukoners.

And it will be a strong voice for Yukoners within the Canadian federation.

Evidence will drive its decision making.

Your government believes in its responsibility to account for what it does.

It will measure progress on its priorities – and report on that progress.

Yukoners will know their government is doing what it says it will do – to make their lives better.

Honourable members, during this sitting you will be asked to consider budgetary measures for the coming year.

The budget will give the financial details on the work your government will do – with and for Yukon people.

It will demonstrate sound fiscal management.

It will show the full picture on the costs of delivering programs and services for Yukoners.

It will reflect your government's commitment to responsibly managing the territory's finances.

Fiscal challenges lie ahead.

Your new government will involve Yukon people in how to address these challenges.

These discussions will guide choices for the future.

Your new government is confident these choices will build a future that includes:

Strong, vibrant communities.

A robust, diversified economy and a healthy environment.

Reconciliation among peoples.

And, a future where Yukoners' lives are better.

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Honourable members, last week, Yukon lost one of the pioneers of responsible government for this territory.

From 1958 to 1961, Jim Smith was a member of this House, when it was known as the Yukon territorial council.

He went on to be Commissioner of Yukon from 1966 to 1976.

Commissioner Smith believed in Yukon's political development.

He championed the involvement of Yukon's elected representatives in charting this territory's future.

Members of this House – and all Yukoners – owe much to his vision – that the people of this territory should shape its destiny.

His passion for Yukon – and his genuine interest in Yukoners from all walks of life and all communities – will be greatly missed.

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Honourable members, as elected representatives of Yukoners, you share a collective responsibility to help guide and shape the future of this territory.

As you begin your proceedings, remember the wisdom of the generations who have come before you.

Look to the promise of this land – and the aspirations of its people.

You are all here to work with Yukon people – to make their lives better.

As you work together, may fairness, respect, humanity and compassion for others guide your deliberations.

Thank you. Merci. Mahsi. Gunalchish.