

**Premier's Address  
Joint Chambers of Commerce  
April 17, 2007**

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- Ladies and gentlemen, members of the Chambers of Commerce, thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak to you today.
- On October 10, 2006, Yukoners voted for political stability and continuity.
- At that time, we asked Yukoners to “Imagine Tomorrow” by re-electing a Yukon Party government to carry on with the direction we established in 2002.
- We asked Yukoners for a second mandate to enable us to implement our platform, “Building Yukon’s Future Together – A Clear Vision for a Bright Future.”
- Yukoners responded by giving us a majority government – the only incumbent government to be returned to office since 1989.
- Our vision for Yukon’s future is built on four major pillars:
  1. achieving a better quality of life by building healthy, safe communities with skilled and adaptable people
  2. protecting Yukon’s environment, preserving our wildlife and studying, mitigating and adapting to the impacts of climate change;
  3. promoting a strong diversified private-sector economy; and
  4. practising good cooperative governance with strong fiscal management.
- This afternoon, I would like to give a brief update, highlighting some of our accomplishments since taking office.

### **A Better Quality of Life for Yukoners**

- I would like to start with the first pillar of our platform, “achieving a better quality of life for Yukoners.”
- Our platform pledge to “make the 2007 Canada Winter Games in Yukon a resounding success and memorable experience for Yukoners and our guests alike that leaves a lasting legacy and provides facilities for future sport venues” was an important element of the first pillar.
- I am here to tell you that, with the help of thousands of Yukoners, the Host Society, the City of Whitehorse and the numerous corporate sponsors, Yukoners met that commitment in full.
- The 2007 Canada Winter Games were the best ever and gave the Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut the opportunity to showcase the north to southern Canadians.
- As the eyes of Canadians were fixed North of 60, the three territories introduced a national “look up north” marketing campaign designed to promote and celebrate Canada’s north as a great place to visit, to invest and to live.
- Hosting the first Canada Games north of the 60<sup>th</sup> parallel is testimony the Yukon has truly “come of age.”
- Yukoners made these Games a huge success and we can’t thank them enough.
- Building healthy, safe communities is also part of achieving a better quality of life.
- During the 2006 election campaign we promised Yukoners that there would be zero-tolerance for drug dealers, and a focus on treatment and new treatment facilities for their victims.

- In November and December of 2006, our government introduced two major enforcement action items from our Substance Abuse Action Plan.
- The first was the implementation of the *Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act* that provides Yukon citizens with a safe and confidential method to deal with specific illegal activities, such as drug dealing, that create an unsafe and unhealthy environment in the communities
- The SCAN office, as it is known, is now operational and this has already resulted in a number of evictions based on their investigations.
- The second action initiative was the establishment of an *RCMP Street Crime Reduction Team* that will focus exclusively on reducing street-level crime and making our streets safer.
- On the treatment side, we are working on an alternative, therapeutic community court to deal with offenders with drug or alcohol addictions, symptoms of FASD and/or mental health issues.
- As well, we are focusing on working with First Nations and NGOs to develop more treatment centres and programs.
- “*Educating today for jobs tomorrow*” was another major platform commitment which we are following through on.
- Your government has increased apprenticeship registrations in Yukon’s 48 designated trades by more than 39 percent in the territory since 2003. This emphasis on trades training is part of our Comprehensive Skills and Trades Training and there will be more initiatives announced in this regard when our Budget is tabled on Thursday.
- It is also worthy to note that 19 percent of Yukon apprentices are First Nations.

- This is one of the highest First Nation participation rates in trades training in the country.
- Our government continues to support literacy as a priority because it is a fundamental building block of education.
- In 2006 your government through the Literacy Action Committee funded 136 literacy projects throughout the territory.
- Another commitment in our 2006 platform was to “work with the federal government, First Nations and community governments to upgrade and construct high quality community infrastructure.”
- In January, the Government of Canada in conjunction with the Yukon government announced more than \$10.5 million in project funding for four projects:
  - (1) the Hamilton Boulevard extension in Whitehorse;
  - (2) road improvements in the Mayo region;
  - (3) a new playground in Dawson City; and
  - (4) a new sewage facility for Pelly Crossing.
- Improving the quality of life of Yukon elders and seniors is of paramount importance to your government.
- We committed in our platform to continue to increase the inventory of affordable housing for seniors and elders.
- After consultations with seniors’ organizations, it has been decided to utilize the 48-unit residential complex, which was used for the Athletes Village, for seniors’ social housing.
- The Seniors Housing Complex, together with the Yukon College Student Residence, will be a lasting legacy of the Canada Winter Games.

- These are but a few highlights of how our government is going about meeting its commitment to improve the quality of life for Yukoners.

### **Protecting and Preserving Yukon's Environment**

- The second pillar of our platform concerns protecting Yukon's environment, preserving our wildlife and dealing with climate change.
- Yukon's Climate Change Strategy has four goals:
  - (1) Enhance awareness and understanding of climate change impacts on Yukon's environment, people and economy.
  - (2) Reduce greenhouse gas emissions through efficiency improvements within Yukon government programs in the short-term and additional measures related to infrastructure development in the long-term.
  - (3) Build Yukon environmental, social and economic systems that are able to adapt to climate change impacts and are positioned to take advantage of opportunities presented by climate change; and
  - (4) Support efforts to establish Yukon as a northern leader for applied climate change research and innovation.
- In February, I met with the federal Minister of Environment, the Honourable John Baird and the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, the Honourable Jim Prentice in Ottawa to talk about the impact of climate change on the territory and to point out that the federal government's approach must also include adaptation initiatives.
- Our government is seeking federal government support to develop the Climate Change Research Centre of Excellence at Yukon College, as well as the Cold Climate Technology and Innovation Cluster and we're optimistic that we will receive the support of the federal government given the importance they have put on climate change and the environment.

- On March 22, 2007, our government hosted the first-ever *Yukon Environmental Forum*, with over 165 delegates and presenters from around the Yukon.
- A major goal of the forum was to bring people together from various interests to discuss how Yukon fish, wildlife and environmental data collection can be improved for sound natural resource management.
- This will be of special interest in the development of a harvest management strategy for the Porcupine Caribou Herd.
- Increased inventory monitoring, data collection and research on the impacts of climate change on the Porcupine Caribou Herd and other wildlife species was a major environmental commitment in our 2006 election platform.

### **Promoting a Strong, Diversified Economy**

- The third pillar of our platform deals with “*promoting a strong diversified private sector economy.*”
- Recent statistics speak for themselves as to how well the Yukon economy is doing.
- Yukon’s population is continuing to grow while our unemployment rate is continuing to fall.
- In February, Yukon’s unemployment rate stood at 3.2 percent, the lowest in Canada.
- In December of 2006, Yukon’s unemployment rate was as low as 2.5 percent.
- These rates are historic lows never experienced before in Yukon.

- In the past five years, exploration activity in the Yukon has increased ten-fold – from \$8 million in 2002, when our government first took office, to over \$80 million in 2006.
- The future for mining in Yukon looks even brighter.
- When total exploration and development expenditures for 2006 and 2007 are tallied up, they could surpass a quarter of a billion dollars.
- In a very short time, Yukon’s mining industry has turned around in a very big way.
- In the latest Fraser Institute survey of jurisdictions in the world considered to be the most attractive for mining investment, Yukon rose to 11<sup>th</sup> place from 21<sup>st</sup> last year.
- When we first took office in 2002, Yukon was rated at 41<sup>st</sup>.
- Tourism is another economic mainstay in promoting the development of a strong diversified economy.
- I have already mentioned the \$5 million national marketing program launched by the three territories on February 15<sup>th</sup> as part of the Canada Winter Games.
- While this takes a pan-northern approach, it is also geared to specifically promote each territory.
- The marketing campaign is a joint initiative involving the departments of Tourism and Culture and Economic Development and includes promotional spots for national television and movie theatres, along with national print advertising and magazine supplements.
- A new website [www.lookUpnorth.ca](http://www.lookUpnorth.ca) was created to support online advertising and to centrally manage interest generated by the campaign.

- We believe that one of the greatest legacies of the Canada Winter Games will be increased tourism visitation and economic investment in the territory for years to come.
- We also helped sponsor the very successful Gathering of Northern Nations Aboriginal Tradeshow and Cultural Exposition during the Canada Winter Games.
- This four day extravaganza showcased and celebrated the diversity of northern aboriginal communities, businesses, arts, crafts performers and culture.
- By all reports, the First Nation artisans did very well
- In February, our government launched a new website [www.investyukon.com](http://www.investyukon.com) based on the theme “*wide open opportunity.*”
- The website, which is linked to the national marketing campaign, provides potential investors with information on seven key economic sectors in Yukon:
  - (1) mining and exploration;
  - (2) tourism and culture;
  - (3) oil and gas;
  - (4) innovation and technology;
  - (5) small and medium enterprise;
  - (6) film and sound; and
  - (7) forestry.
- The website also features specific information on Yukon’s strategic location, infrastructure, transportation, lifestyle, business climate and labour market.

### **Practicing Good Government**

- The fourth pillar of our 2006 election platform is one of the most important.
- It concerns practicing good government and includes our vision of Yukon coming of age through effective leadership, political stability, cooperative governance and strong fiscal management.
- With respect to fiscal management it is important to note that the Auditor General of Canada has given the Public Accounts of the Government of Yukon a clean bill of health for four consecutive years.
- This is a significant tribute to the fiscal management of our government.
- Our government is blessed by having a highly dedicated, professional public service.
- Our style of governing sets us apart from previous Yukon governments.
- We practice cooperative governance and form partnerships
- On April 15, 2007, our government initiated a review to examine municipal funding for local community governments.
- We will be working with the Association of Yukon Communities to consider real-world fiscal demands communities are currently experiencing in relation to the programs and services they provide to their citizens and to identify possible areas of improvement.
- In our first mandate we practiced cooperative governance with Yukon First Nations and established the Yukon Forum in law.

- The Yukon Forum enables the Government of Yukon to sit down with the 14 Yukon First Nation governments to deal with matters of mutual interest and of significant benefit to the territory.
- For example, at the Yukon Forum held in December 2006, the Government of Yukon and the 14 First Nation governments continued their partnership by approving 17 projects under the first round of the Northern Strategy Trust, valued at \$9.34 million of the \$40 million fund.
- At the same forum, our respective governments also agreed that Yukon's \$50 million share of the Northern Housing Trust would be allocated by having \$32.5 million going to Yukon First Nation governments and \$17.5 million to the Yukon government.
- Our pan-northern approach with our two sister territories has provided major benefits to all three territories in areas such as health funding, sovereignty and security, Territorial Formula Financing and of course the recent 2007 Canada Winter Games.
- On March 19<sup>th</sup> all three northern Premiers were invited by the federal Finance Minister, the Honourable Jim Flaherty to hear the good news that the Territorial Formula Financing agreements discontinued by the previous federal government have been restored to a principles-based formula that will meet the needs of the north, together with a \$25 million annual infrastructure fund for the next seven years.
- We have a similar close working relationship with Alaska, Alberta and British Columbia.
- In January, a delegation of Yukon government Ministers met with their Alaskan counterparts to renew the positive working relationship with Governor Sarah Palin's new administration.
- Topics for discussion included large infrastructure project, such as the Alaska Highway Natural Gas Pipeline, the Alaska-Canadian Rail Link Pre-feasibility Study and the Port Access Strategic Study.

- Discussions were also held on tourism partnerships and the renewal of the Alaska-Yukon Intergovernmental Relations Accord.
- On March 1<sup>st</sup>, I had a similar meeting with the new Premier of Alberta, Ed Stelmach, who has replaced Yukon's good friend Premier Ralph Klein.
- Once again, the meeting was designed to carry on the positive working relationship Yukon and Alberta have developed over the years.
- I must emphasize that these are only a few of the highlights of how our government is meeting our election commitments.
- There are many challenges ahead but it is important to recognize that we have five years to carry out our mandate.
- We believe we are off to a very good start
- The Yukon Legislative Assembly will be sitting on Thursday, April 19<sup>th</sup> and we will be tabling our 2007-2008 Budget, which will carry on the implementation of our election commitments.
- In closing, I want to say how proud I am of Yukoners in making the 2007 Canada Winter Games such a tremendous success and the best games ever.
- We are the little territory that could and we did!
- Thank you.