

**Public Policy Forum Breakfast at the Rideau Club**

Speech for Yukon Premier Dennis Fentie

Tuesday, Feb. 10, 2009 at 7:30 a.m.

- Thank you Mr. Mitchell for the kind introduction and the invitation to be here today at this Public Policy Forum breakfast.
- Colleagues, honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen – it is both an honour and a pleasure to be here today to speak to you about Yukon and the Emerging North.
- I will start by stating that Yukon welcomes the federal government’s growing interest in the North and its recognition of the importance of sustainable, healthy northern communities as one of the key factors in ensuring Canada’s sovereignty and security.
- The world’s attention has shifted North these days – this is not surprising, considering the recent major development of the region’s economies, governance and environment.
- In the face of a changing climate, the unique and expanding challenges in the North are resonating around the globe, and the North stands ready to meet those challenges.
- The three territories, Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut, stand together at the frontline of Canada’s arctic sovereignty as proud northerners.

We know that the key to success is through strong partnerships: east and west, as well as south, north, and over the top.

- This morning I would like to share some insights into Yukon and our people: who we are, what drives our development and how we are moving forward in partnership to strengthen our economy, to protect our environment, and strengthen our social fabric.
- I will also touch upon other issues important to the North including governance, infrastructure, energy, research and development, climate change and adaptation.

[Slide – What is Yukon?]

- Yukon is one of the last great frontiers, with an abundance of untapped potential.
- Our rich culture, geography, natural resources, proximity to major economic centres, advanced telecommunications network, and positive investment climate are all fuelling growth and securing sustainability in the North.
- Yukon is well-connected to Alberta, British Columbia and Alaska by all-weather highways.

- Yukon is home to an international airport with regular flight service from Calgary, Edmonton, Vancouver, Northwest Territories and Alaska; and twice weekly service to Frankfurt Germany from April to October.
- 98 per cent of communities, homes and Yukon businesses have access to broadband Internet.
- Because of this connectivity, our educated workforce, our air access, and clear lifestyle advantages, Yukon has attracted an impressive amount of business activity.
- Yukon is well-positioned in the Emerging North. It is the only territory with the responsibility, similar to that of provinces, for the management of our public lands and resources.
- Since April 1, 2003, through devolution, decisions about Yukon land and resources are made by Yukoners. Our government has worked to establish further regulatory certainty for investors and businesses.
- Yukon is also the only Canadian jurisdiction where the majority of First Nations, 11 of 14, have settled land claims and reached self-government agreements.
- We have also done significant work in facilitating cooperative arrangements between industry and First Nations governments to ensure maximum benefits for our communities.

- These collaborative working relationships with First Nations allow us to encourage full participation in Yukon's economy. In other words, closing the gap on economic opportunity for Aboriginal people.

[Slide]

- To further enable such collaborative relationships with Yukon First Nations, we have implemented cooperative governance structures, specifically the *Yukon Forum* and the *Intergovernmental Forum*.
- 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.
- The *Intergovernmental Forum* extends the arrangement between the Yukon government and the Yukon First Nation governments to include the federal minister of the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs so that key decisions and deliberations which affect all Canadians are discussed in a forum that allows an ongoing partnership in the decision-making process.
- Our government-to-government relationships will continue to be a key factor in the ongoing success of the territory and are a model for the rest of Canada.

[Slide – Yukon’s Economy]

- Yukon has not yet felt the full impacts of the global economic downturn to the same extent as other parts of Canada, as our regional economy tends to experience a lag-time when compared to national economic trends.
- But, like other jurisdictions, we are deeply concerned about the changes to the global economy.
- We are managing our way through this global cycle, remaining prudent with our finances and investing strategically in our economy, and we believe this strategy will allow us to continue to maintain a focus on a sustainable economy for our territory.
- For the last several years, Yukon has enjoyed a growing economy.
- Our government investment attraction strategy supports a diversified private sector economy that includes:
  - natural resources – mineral exploration and production;
  - oil and gas including pipeline infrastructure, forestry and value-added manufacturing;
  - tourism, arts and culture;
  - film and sound; and
  - research and development.
- I.T. firms, graphic designers, animators and internet companies are also helping showcase Yukon as a prime centre for the knowledge-based sector.

- Yukon's population is at its highest in more than a decade and, despite the present economic downturn, we project a long-term growth in our labour force due to the global demand for minerals, oil and gas, and other resources that have propelled increased attention to our territory.

[Slide]

- The Yukon government and citizens have worked to create a balance between the economy and the environment by using an integrated approach to resource management.
- For instance, Yukon has a unique single assessment regime – the *Yukon Environmental and Socio-Economic Assessment Act* – a framework to assess projects and support decisions of First Nation, federal and territorial governments.
- This single assessment process replaces the Yukon *Environmental Assessment Act* and the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*.
- Commonly referred to as YESAA, this streamlined regime has improved the overall assessment and permitting process with its fixed timelines, providing certainty for investors.

- As I have shown so far, the foundation for Yukon's future is built upon business opportunities and investment supported by infrastructure, streamlined regulatory regimes and importantly partnerships:
  - partnerships with Yukon First Nations and the private sector;
  - partnerships between our respective governments and the Government of Canada;
  - partnerships with Alaska and other neighbouring territories and provinces; and
  - partnerships with United States, European and Asian interests.
- Yukon will continue to partner in the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region (PNWER): an economic and communications corridor that fosters greater international relations and competitiveness in the global marketplace.
- We will continue to develop and diversify trade and investment links with China and the Asian region to manage our global economic risks.
- We have also established intergovernmental accords with our neighbours Alaska, British Columbia, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut to divide our work on mutually important issues.

[Slide]

- As an example, the three territories released a vision document in 2007, entitled *A Northern Vision – A Stronger North and a Better Canada*.

- This document, which is included in the folders provided to you today, emphasizes that the territories are speaking with a northern voice, and the North's time is now.
  
- Together we are saying:
  - To ensure Canadian sovereignty, we must continue to build sustainable communities
  - That we must adapt to climate change – the North is being hit first and worst in Canada
  - And to move forward in partnership – not just the North, but Canada as a whole.
  
- Another example of working in partnership: Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut developed a northern transportation blueprint as part of the *Western Transportation Strategy*.
  
- In February 2008, all three Territories signed *Northern Connections: A Multi-Modal Blueprint for the North*.
  
- Northern Connections identifies the issues for road, rail, air and sea in each territory, from the challenges of increased use to climate change impacts such as melting permafrost.
  
- The three territories remain focused on key infrastructure investments that will create jobs in the short-term and provide an environment for long-term investment and growth.

- Stable and adequate funding is needed to ensure such as long-term economic sustainability.
- Particular priorities for Yukon are: improving the world-famous Alaska Highway through the Canada-U.S. Shikwak project, as well as housing, water supply and sewage infrastructure.
- I welcome the infrastructure investments announced in the recent budget.

[Slide – Federal focus]

- We are also pleased with the federal government's commitment to a new, stand-alone economic development agency for the territories.
- A regional agency would complement our efforts and further enable us to address issues in a way that best suits our unique situations.
- It will also help stimulate activity in the North as part of a Canada-wide strategy to cope with this economic downturn.
- On behalf of Yukoners, we are encouraged by the federal government's continued commitment to making strategic investments and further unleashing the vast potential in the Canada's Emerging North.

[Slide – Energy infrastructure]

- In Yukon, we are working to eliminate the need for diesel-powered electrical energy generation – developing renewable energy infrastructure is another key requirement for the territory’s economic growth.
- Plainly put, investments in energy efficiency and conservation make good policy, ecological and economic sense.
- Our government is in the process of developing and implementing two pivotal initiatives: a *Yukon Energy Strategy* and a *Yukon Climate Change Action Plan*.
- Our *Energy Strategy*, will guide energy programs and economic development over the next 10 years.
- And our Climate Change Action Plan, to be released in the very near future, commits Yukon to set targets for greenhouse gas emission reduction within two years, and to enhance support for climate change monitoring, education and adaptation initiatives.
- We are proud that Yukon is among the leading jurisdictions already investing heavily in retrofit programs focused on green and high-efficiency households.

- Hydro electricity is Yukon's best clean energy option at this time and we will be looking to form partnerships with Canada, First Nations, and the private sector to develop this potential.

[Slide – Climate change, infrastructure]

- Yukon is serious about finding innovative unique ways to address northern challenges and adapt to climate change.
- We look to the federal government and other partners to help us achieve our goals.
- Our Climate Change Action Plan will highlight two prime initiatives:
  - The establishment of a Yukon Research Centre of Excellence; and
  - A Yukon Cold Climate Innovation Centre in affiliation with Yukon College and its Northern Research Institute.
- The Yukon Research Centre of Excellence will focus on climate change adaptation, attracting and leading research and ensuring Yukoners benefit from the results.
- The Yukon Cold Climate Innovation Centre involves the creation of a research, development and commercialization centre for the export of new, innovative products and services.

[Slide – Climate Change, Northern Knowledge-based Sector]

- We are well aware that investment in the knowledge-based sector, specifically research and innovation, play a stabilizing role in regional economies.
- These investments will not only diversify our economic base but also encourage greater educational opportunities and technical capabilities.
- We commend the commitment in the recent budget speech to building “a world-class arctic research station that will be on the cutting edge of arctic issues, including science and resource development”.
- Our government has encouraged a pan-northern “Network” approach to northern-based research, encouraging links between the Yukon Research Centre of Excellence, the proposed federal Arctic Research Station, and research interests throughout the world.
- The Yukon-based network of research and innovation is active. Yukon is interested to further integrate our knowledge, infrastructure and programs into the growing northern knowledge-based sector.
- We are making Yukon a leader in northern climate change research and believe that commercialization of cold climate technologies will provide significant economic opportunities and will help others developed deeper understandings of the north and to adapt to climate change in the future.

[Slide – Closing]

- In closing, I would like to say that these are exciting and challenging times for Yukon as we proceed down an uncertain yet optimistic pathway to prosperity in the decades to come.
- 2009 brings exceptional uncertainty for the global economy, yet it is certain that cold climate technology and research capacity will grow and help a broad variety of industries.
- We are already investing wisely in renewable energy infrastructure and playing our part in conserving energy. We will continue to make further strides in this direction.
- Building on present challenges, the timing is right to explore opportunities in Yukon as it is well- situated in the Emerging North.
- I invite you to join us in building Yukon's future.
- It's important now more than ever that we work in partnership and move through these challenging times together.
- Thank you.
- Merci.