

YUKON ARCHIVES SOUND RECORDINGS TRANSCRIPT

Title: Right Honourable John Diefenbaker
Speakers: Erik Nielsen (EN), John Diefenbaker (JD), unidentified speaker (US)
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Abstract

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Transcript

0:00:00

EN: Ladies and gentleman, it is most fitting that we have with us at this third Yukon Northern Resource Conference a man who is perhaps the reason for it all. He was the first Prime Minister of our country to visit the Yukon and Northwest Territories and not just once during his term of office. Perhaps I should have began – begun – began – by saying that the views that I am expressing here are my own and are not necessarily those of this conference. Mr. Diefenbaker is renewing many old friendships here. His first words last night as he got off the airplane at around midnight, having come up from Edmonton and stopping all the way were, and Bob Choate listened to this on behalf of the Chamber of Commerce, "At last I have discovered the meaning of the word eternity." [laughter] Then this morning when we were walking around town we saw one of my Indian friends from out of town and he recognized Mr. Diefenbaker at once and he said "Hello Mr. Diefenbaker." And the Chief said "Well you've got sharp eyes." And then we went our separate ways. And I said to the Chief "All these people have sharp eyes Chief. They can spot a moose two or three miles away." The Chief said "I thought he was a bit short sighted." [laughter]

0:02:05

I take great pleasure in presenting to this gathering a man who has already known to all. Perhaps our greatest Canadian, who as Prime Minister and as leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition fought against great odds to arouse Canadians to the importance of northern resources. Indeed it is this man more than any other who convinced Canadians everywhere of the great value of the Yukon and Northwest Territories to the development of Canada as a whole. From his early youth he held that conviction and when he became Prime Minister of our country he immediately set about the implementation of policies which would open up these hitherto inaccessible regions to the resource discoveries and development which have in fact occurred. The great and dynamic resource programs of Mr. Diefenbaker's administration have not been forgotten and they never shall be forgotten by those of us who have lived here sufficient time to be able to make comparisons. The Development Roads Program here in the Yukon and Northwest Territories, the Roads to Resources Programs in the

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provinces, the financial assistance to prospectors, the emergence of a northern oil policy, telephone, telegraph, radio communication, in short the opening of the North. All of which are now bearing excellent dividends. The Pine Point Railway, tourism incentives, national housing act amendments, and industrial development bank amendments, establishment of a second mortgage fund and low cost housing fund, and many other extremely successful policies, gave to the Yukon and the Northwest Territories a sense of awakening which had not been experienced before or since. Above all this was a sense of recognition, the atmosphere that the North was finally being accepted, which in the Diefenbaker years gave to the North generally a strong sense of national destiny. To us in these northern regions we believe that at last our southern countrymen knew that we were here and a part of a country that had a significant part to play in the building of Canada. He has always been conscious of the vital importance of the North, of its possibilities, and of the duty which Canadian governments have to invest a larger portion of the nation's resources in the development of this part of Canada. Truly a last frontier. Mr. Diefenbaker's sense of confidence in the North never wavered, even when he was accused of being over optimistic. One recalls the severe criticism of investing in development roads in the North, recalls also the statements when the Pine Point Railway was begun and the dramatic vindication of the building of that railroad. The northern oil potential has opened up tremendous new possibilities. Recently we have heard of an announcement of a 1.4 billion pipeline from the Northwest Territories into the heart of the United States. Thus Mr. Diefenbaker's vision of the North is panning out in reality far more expressive and startling than anything his critics ever could have imaged. It is therefore most appropriate that one who has always been resource conscious, who gave us the National Energy Board and who advocated the National Power Grid for Canada, who in opposition insisted on Canadian control of Canadian resources, should be here today in Whitehorse to address this gathering. Dedicated as it is to the preservation and exploitation of the immense resources of the Yukon and Northwest Territories, as the one person chiefly instrumental in bringing to an end the ice age of non-northern development Mr. Diefenbaker deserves well of the North and of this conference. Many of his policies and programs are even now the stimulus behind gathering such as this. Because while there were many Chief who for one reason or another scoffed at and scorned and ridiculed your northern vision there were others who did not. A great many of these latter are here today and you may be sure that the people of the Yukon have faith in your resource policy. And I am impressed Sir that as a prophet you are one of the few in history who has been able to see a great many of his prophecies realized. It is perhaps for this reason Sir, unlike many prophets, you are certainly not without honour in your own country. It is being more and more realized today that many of the policies which you set in motion are in fact policies vital to Canada's national life and continued existence as a nation, not the least of these being your massive program of northern development. It is for that reason Sir that your presence here, a leader in northern development, a true prophet of the greatness of the North, a believer in the future destiny of this nation, is more than merely a chance visit. It represents for you Sir the fulfillment of many of the dreams you dreamed and even if only in a partial way and for us in the Yukon and gathered at this conference an opportunity to pay honour to one of the great men of this era. As one of Canada's outstanding legal minds, as a spokesman throughout your political life for the ordinary Canadian, as a believer in Canada's greatness, and as a consistent and determined defender of our national identity, we as Canadians, and I know our visitors to this conference from other lands take pleasure in having you with us today, a view

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which I am confident Sir is shared by the vast majority of your fellow citizens across this land. Ladies and gentleman, a great Canadian. [Applause]

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JD: Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentleman, I am about to start to write my memoirs, and when I do I think I will pick an entirely objective person to assist me [laughter] and I – I – I must say that I – tremendously interested in what he had to say and well on this occasion I will do no more than bring to your attention the fact that throughout the years that I had the honor to head the government of this county and to be Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, the member for Yukon was one who in season and out of season pressed forward for action on behalf of Canadians in this part of our country.

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And I – I came west when I was a boy, the pioneering days. My father was a teacher. I was saying to somebody just a moment ago that he was the only teacher in Canada's history who taught two prime ministers. He taught Mackenzie King and me. What history will say is to which case he made the worst mistake isn't for me [laughter] at the moment to go into detail on. But we came west, settled near what had been Fort Carleton. Those days they, I was eight years of age, the buffalo wallows were everywhere. The buffalo bones were everywhere. The pioneers were everywhere.

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I was quite interested this morning when he referred to a moment ago about an Indian gentleman having designated me and knew who I was because that doesn't always happen. I – I was in Toronto recently, than which there is no other place where people are identified more clearly and definitely than there. And I was to speak at the Royal York Hotel to the Empire Club. And I walked up the street to the corner of Bay and Front and there, was just about noon time, a little exercise before the meeting. And there were about 30 people on the corner waiting for a car or for transportation and they started to whisper one to the other. And finally one more forward than the rest came up to me and he said "I'd like to ask you a question." I said "Well alright, go ahead." He said "Have you a double?" [laughter] I said "Not that I know of." He said "Do you mean to tell me that nobody ever told you, you look like John Diefenbaker?" [laughter] I – I – I was able – I was able to tell him with complete honesty that that had never happened.

0:11:47

Now when I come in to this area, this part of Canada, there is something about your hospitality and warmth that's difficult to express. Now I – I'm not one of those that had any islands named after me, the way Borden, and Meighen, and King have up here. Nor any mountains. But I have a distinction all of my own. The biggest lake in Saskatchewan was named after me. No other former Prime Minister ever had such a thing happen. Certainly Macdonald never did. But he was allergic to water anyhow [laughter] so I presume that that is the reason.

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And I think of those ... some people wonder sometimes why it is that I'm not here Mr. President to advertise Prince Albert. Well sometimes I put in a word. It's the only place in Canada that's had three Prime Ministers. And I'm not going to conduct a Gallup Poll here because there would be an awful lot of you wouldn't be able to answer who the first one was. Of course it was Wilfrid Laurier in 1896. Now one of the reasons for it having had three Prime Ministers, the fact that it was a pioneer locality. But more particularly the fact now that for any constituency to have been represented by three, there must be a great many men and women of conviction. And Prince Albert has that. We have the penitentiary [laughter], the common jail, the women's jail, and open security jail. More men and women of conviction in my town [laughter] than any other place in Canada.

0:13:38

Now, you get all kinds of honours when you leave politics. And I, I had one recently that I must tell you about. The Jewish congregations of British Columbia, or Vancouver. They gave me an honour. They gave me the tree of life. Beautiful thing. And I naturally was interested about this tree of life. What's it mean? Well I found out that it means that I will live as long as Moses. I naturally made inquiries as to how long Moses lived. 130 years. I'll tell you when that news got back to Ottawa. [laughter] Well.

0:14:33

I have been here on quite a number of occasions. The first was in 1941. And on subsequent occasions. Each time I come here I am moved by the tremendous impetuous, the initiative, the growth, the dedication, and the hopeness of the people. Erik Nielsen mentioned that a moment ago. The expansions that have taken place. Yesterday I was in – the city – but in my day it did not have this name. They – Mounted Police used to stop at our humble little home on the prairie. Surprising how they, coming from what was then Edmonton through to Prince Albert hence on to Winnipeg. They stopped here. In those days it was Edmonton. That's before it became the Klondike. [laughter] I – I – I saw those pioneering days. I lived those pioneering days. I come up here and meet with you. See something once more of the greatness of our country. And today I am going to depart from the usual course that I follow dealing specifically with one or other matters. I'm going to become strangely enough mention was made of prophecy. That was entirely without any suggestion on my part. I am going to do that which a politician is permitted to do. Indeed the only prophet that can make prophecies and turn out to be wrong and never be held responsible for them [laughter] is a politician. [laughter] And I go back to 1910 when I was a newsboy. I was in second year in university. I used to meet the early morning train in Saskatoon. Sir Wilfred Laurier was there to lay the cornerstone of the University of Saskatchewan. I went over to the old Canadian Northern Railway station. You can get the story in Schule's [sp?] Life of Laurier because it's one of those events in Canadian history, the continuity of history. And I sold him a paper and he asked me to come over to his car. And the Prime Minister of Canada and the newsboy sat down together. And we chatted for half an hour or more. That afternoon he laid the cornerstone of the University of Saskatchewan. And I have already said you can read it in the Life of Laurier. And he said

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"You have unusual newsboys here." And he named me. He said "This morning at the hour of six he sold me a paper. Finally after I chatted with him for a while he said 'Prime Minister, I can't waste any more time on you. [laughter] I have work to do.'" [laughter] And that's my Canada. 46 years thereafter as Prime Minister my car was parked in the identical space same situation. What did we talk about? We talked about the dreams that I had. Far removed we had been for years from the nearest village. 16 - 17 miles away. All we had was literary things. All we had were books whatever my brother and I wanted and one of those books was the Rand and McNally atlas. And that's what I talked to Laurier about that day. That great north area. We talked about the Prime Ministers. We talked of Macdonald. We talked of Laurier's contribution. In their own lives – lifetimes bitterly criticized. Often voted against. But in the emergence of the years they become part and parcel of the tradition and legendary life of their country for their contributions. And I think of Laurier ... And I think of Macdonald in the last election of 1891. Five days before the election when we was ill he was speaking at Smith Falls, Ontario. And it was a noisy meeting. Finally he got up to speak and it was still noisy. And then a great big Irishman, one of those Ottawa Valley Irishman, got up and said "Let us have silence here. Let us listen to what he has to say." Some people by their commanding presence are able to dominate and this man dominated and there was silence. And when Sir John started his speech he said "I want to thank you my friend. Thank-you for your contribution." He said "Sir John, don't run away with the idea that I'd vote for you. I wouldn't vote for you if you were the Angel Gabriel." [laughter] Oh, Sir John said "I'm sure you're right because you wouldn't be in my constituency." [laughter] Well, these are the living things of our history and our Canada. And I told you a moment ago that what we talked about was Canada and the North. We talked of Captain [Joseph-Elzéar] Bernier, we spoke of [Vilhjalmur] Stefansson, that great north land that they said would never be habitable, of Macdonald's concept of one Canada of a narrow line across Canada and that vast hinterland. We talked of the tremendous influx of population into Canada in the days of Laurier. These were the things that gave me the idea that I would do something in my day and generation. To develop that portion of Canada that was regarded as simply a land of ice and perpetual snow. That would bring together all of the various races of men whatever their racial origin might be or their religion. Build you the kind of Canada in which there would be one nation, one Canada. To do that we had to see to it that those areas in northern Canada were opened up. Rather forbidding. I saw the mounted police that served here. Served in Dawson City in 1898 to 1902 and '03. My [?] Major P. [Percival] W. Pennefather. He ended up as a Superintendent of the Mounted Police. He was stationed here in Whitehorse. I think it was 1900. And there was danger of a raid from Alaska. The Sons of the Setting Sun. I think there was a – I don't know whether they were always called that but, they were going to come over here these Sons [laughter] and they were going to take over, they were going to take over Whitehorse such as it was. Old Major Pennefather was up here on the hill with a Gatling gun that had been saved up during the days of the Saskatchewan rebellion [laughter]. He was lonely. He had looked on the wine a bit. Suddenly he heard a noise at night and he turned on the Gatling gun. The Sons of the Setting Sun were not there. The Sons never came and Whitehorse remained a part of Canada. And he used to tell this story. He also told me about that gulley up there. What do you call it now?

EN: Dead Man's Gulch.

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JD: Told me about that. He said "Many a time I - I - went into that place." Those were the days when the country was being opened up.

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Now, what have I have in mind? Well, I have in mind to talk with you about this part of Canada. Mr. Nielsen has reviewed something of my views and my attitudes. They said it was a dream. They said it was a nightmare. They said "Those ideas, what are they? He tends to build highways from, from igloo to igloo." In 1878, when Macdonald when he talked about building the CPR, the only difference was that [Liberal MP Lucius Seth] Huntington said "He intends to build a railroad from wigwam to wigwam." It's a wonderful thing to live at a time like this. The opportunity of Canadians. People weren't interested in the North. They are getting awfully interested everywhere. I was in Washington a week ago with the Prime Minister at the occasion of the funeral of my friend [Dwight D.] Eisenhower. They know there's a northern Canada now. And suddenly there is a belief being expressed that we in Canada have failed. That we have not established our sovereignty over the North. That we are in a position where these great areas between here and the Pole may belong to other nations. It's time for us as Canadians to assert definitely and absolutely our sovereignty over these northern areas and contiguous to Canada. It's time for us. It's long overdue. When I was Prime Minister I used to say "Let's get somebody up there on this island or someone else on some other island. Let's raise our flag. Let's make it ours." It was thought that our sovereignty had been established for all time to come. And today it is being challenged. [Nikita] Khrushchev on one occasion said "Most of the north belongs to me." He said "You people don't know how to deal with it at all." He said "You have it filled with American soldiers whose purpose is to destroy us." I said "Do you know that?" And he said "Yes." I gave the offer to him, I said "If you'll pick out the particular location where they are, I'll give you the right of full inspection." This was in correspondence. "I'll give you the right of full inspection, by air or ground, if the United States is using these northern areas for aggressive purposes. Providing you allow us the same right over whatever area you designate on our side of the Pole for full examination." And he said "There's no purpose in that because we haven't anything of an aggressive nature in our part of the polar areas." That ended that business.

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Now then, how are we going to assert our sovereignty? Well I have given quite a bit of thought to this and I have discussed the matter at length. And I am going to place before you a proposition. And I am going to try and keep within the time limit. I think that the time has come for us as Canadians to set up an arctic force. The Eskimo is among the most intelligent of human beings, mechanically minded. Start up a force. They know the North. 500 Eskimos from the east and west arctic. Today all we have over northern Canada is 400 military personnel. And all that vast area of the arctic larger than Europe there are only two active Canadian military bases in the arctic. One at Inuvik [, Northwest Territories] and the other at Alert [, Nunavut]. Why don't we have some training in the North? We're talking about NATO now. And according to the Prime Minister, Canada should be looking after her defences on the North American continent. Not saying I'm in agreement with that entirely. If we were to do this, and this is not

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a fantastic dream, it's been discussed at length with certain people who know something of the military responsibilities of our country and what can be done. It would give the Eskimo a meaningful national task. It would provide training in mechanical things. It would make the Eskimo members of the force. On retirement, useful members of society. It would be linked in this force on the basis of permanent posts of platoons of 20 or 30 men. In those sensitive areas of the North where our sovereignty is being challenged today - Mackenzie Bay, Cape Bathurst, Amundsen Gulf, Banks, Prince Patrick, Borden, Meighen, and Mackenzie King Islands and so on. You would gradually increase the numbers over and above the 500 to some 2,000. Making available to young Canadians of high educational ability an opportunity to serve. Young men and women say to me "It must have been wonderful to live in your age?" I say to them "What we saw was as nothing compared to what you will see and are seeing." It would provide for opportunities for a civilian extensive complement of engineers and scientists. In my boyhood they used to say "Go west young man." My message to you in this connection to you is that today it's "Go north young man. Go north young woman." Cast something of that pioneering spirit. At the same time do your part to preserve for Canada the vastness of the resources of the North that are only now being realized. To preserve for Canada the greatest undeveloped frontier anywhere in the Americas. To expand and emphasize Canadian sovereignty everywhere. To provide new vistas of opportunity. They say "Young men and women today haven't got the ambition. They haven't the vision. They take it too easy." I don't find it that way. You give them a picture of the kind of Canada that you've got in mind and their prepared ...

[tape changed]

... I wish I were younger. I wish I could see something of what would take place here. If I were younger I'd join in this crusade to national greatness. The day of the pioneer is not over. The day of national greatness, we are at the morning star. If we were to bring about the establishment of such a force we would do something to the building of this nation and its assurance for the future. We'd raise the young Canadians a hope of dedication and determination. There'd be no slothful people. There'd be none of those that say "Well, what is there to live for? Social security will protect us." They'd be lifted up.

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Now then what else do we need? I don't have to tell you. Transportation is a key to the development of the North. Mr. Nielsen dealt with some of the things that we did in my day which have been followed. New ideas of transportation must be assessed and used if economically possible. [?] ships, hovercraft, air foils, cargo submarines, new types of pipeline, cargo aircraft. I see the day of atomic submarines, within this century, in a cargo service between Canada and Europe. The United States proved what could be done with its two submarines the 'Nautilus' and the 'Skate'. Will there be submarine tankers, and oil carriers? You say it's visionary? When Macdonald saw the dream of opening up western Canada they said it was. Our ports must be developed and expanded. While we sit and contemplate, the USSR is building these great northern cities. It's making its ports worthwhile. Fort Churchill is nothing as compared to Murmansk. Great transportation problems of the North; one is moving goods in and out and the other is to move human and other resources from place to place within the North. The

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construction of a northern transit corridor. But these things can only be done if men and women are prepared to unite together to bring them about. And to make the North more habitable, well, I spent some weeks some years ago studying a proposition that is now receiving more and more attention. Some Russian scientists believe that by the construction of a dam across Bering Strait, that would require the cooperation of the USSR, the United States, and Canada, the climate of the North would be radically changed. A gigantic project to pump water out of the arctic and the result would be that the Atlantic current would flow across the arctic. It can be done. You go on the Russian side and see what they have done. Great cities. I see a day, these young men and women will – be dreams to us today but they'll see a northern Canada where there are plastic domed cities. We were almost ready to bring that about in Frobisher. I think it was 1962. But we had to turn it down finally when it was decided by the transportation companies [?] that they were not going to use that. Plastic domed cities heated by nuclear power and heat. These are just some of the things and I had more but my time is up. But I give you a picture of the kind of Canada that I want to see. What can be achieved? When men and women are prepared to stand. Let's imitate the Americans. They've built an Americanism based on pride of country. And we too often have failed to do that. Building Canada. Making possible the achievement of the dreams far and beyond those that most have today. When I meet young men and women I say to them "Dream your dreams." People were ridiculing, you'll be the only one. If it's for the good of your country, stand. You'd be amazed the reaction. For after all no advance was ever made expecting in the heart and mind of one person who starting as a minority finally became a majority.

0:37:45

My times up. I don't want you people to say of me as was said of a well-known western politician some – oh in my early days they told this story. He had a captive audience. He was very fond of history. He spoke for an hour on the history of mankind. Then he spoke for an hour on the present generation of that time, and he didn't think very much of them. Just the way men and women today speak of the youngsters of today. But if we told some of the things we know of their parents and grandparents, they'd have an answer to some of the criticisms that are heaped on them. For an hour he went on like that and then he said "Now before I sit down I feel I ought to deal with the unborn generation for a while." Somebody in the audience said "You'd better hurry up or they'll be here [laughter] before you finish." I don't want you to be in that position. I thank you for the opportunity and privilege of being here. To feel that something that everyone has shown. I've always had it. I'll always be an optimist. I've never gloried in victory or been [?] in defeat. If you follow a principle, there will be ups and downs in life, but you will know that ultimately what you have in mind will be attained. One Canada, one nation. Canadians must not only dream dreams of the greatness of Canada's destiny, they must as you are doing in this organization do your part to make those dreams come true. Great as have been the achievements of the past, but it is a magnificent record Canada's. We don't know our history. We don't know that it was here in Canada that the Catholics first received equality in religion by the British Crown 50 years before the United Kingdom. Or that the Jew had these rights in Canada 15 or 20 years before the opportunity came to the [?]. We don't know, we don't boast. We don't realize that it was in Canada, and in these days of discrimination it is well to remember it, that it was in Canada where slavery was first

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abolished before any other nation in the world in 1792. And to the women there are so few who realize that Canada had the first women's suffrage of all the countries of the world. From 1830 to 1839. My old great-grandfather used to say we had to put an end to it. The women had the vote in Toronto and Montreal and his answer was "They're not intelligent enough. When they vote they don't vote as their husband's vote." [laughter] Canada, freedom of religion, freedom against discrimination. The abolition of slavery. That's the greatness of its past. And I see the Canada of the future I want. I won't see it. But I will feel it. When you start casting your longest shadow towards the east comes opportunities to do one's part for one's country. And I come here to meet with you and this very simple message, to tell you how much I appreciate what you sir and those connected with you are doing to raise the vistas of opportunity and determine the force and the future of Canada's greatness.

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[applause, possibly standing ovation]

0:42:32

US: Right Honourable Mr. Diefenbaker, on behalf of the Chamber of Commerce and the Yukon Chamber of Mines and the delegates assembled here today, it is my pleasure as Chairman of this conference to thank you for your participation in and your contribution to this conference. Your words here today I am sure will give all of us much food for thought. We thank you once again for taking time out from your busy schedule to be with us and we wish you Godspeed on your return home. Thank-you sir. Now ladies and gentleman [applause] we do have a busy afternoon and evening ahead of us so we would appreciate it if you would go back down the south access road in order not to get into a traffic jam in the city of Whitehorse. Thank-you very much.

[background noise from delegates]

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[end of recording]