

Yukon's First Nations Party ^[1]

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EXCERPTS: Gerald Dickson Sr. had given up on voting.

"I don't vote because I do not like other people speaking on my behalf," he said. "As a First Nations person, I mean, they can't."

Instead, Dickson has decided to run in the upcoming territorial election under the banner of the newly formed First Nations Party.

He will be seeking election in the Kluane riding, in the traditional territory of his First Nation.

And while he admits it is last minute, Dickson hasn't formed the party for himself.

Elders from many First Nation communities in the territory have encouraged him, he said.

And he is not alone.

Carcross elder Stanley James has already joined the roster as the party's candidate for the Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes riding.

And on Thursday, Dickson was in talks with another possible candidate from Ross River, who would potentially run in the Pelly-Nisutlin riding.

Dickson, who is the leader of the new party, is a carpenter by trade and has sat on his First Nation's council for several terms, the first time at the age of 17, he said.

He was brought up traditionally and over the years has heard the voices of his elders ignored more and more, he said.

"Our elders are not being heard," said Dickson, adding that it is not just the public governments, but many times also First Nation governments that are ignoring elders' guidance.

The trend is most obvious when looking at managing the environment, said Dickson.

"Carmacks elders said to stop fishing 15, 20 years ago," he said. "But the elders have to wait for the minister to make that final decision. When the elders say stop the fishing - stop the fishing. You don't have to go and test it."

"Rather than having nonnatives speaking on my behalf, or First Nations' behalf, or elders' behalf, we have to speak for ourselves."

"So that's my goal. To establish in the legislature a parallel decision-making process, using the elders' knowledge as a guiding tool. So you'll see a brownface standing there, arguing for our points. Using the traditional knowledge as a guiding tool to manage our natural resources. That's what it's all about."

It is the long-term insight of traditional knowledge that motivates Dickson the most. Current governments only discuss what they are going to do now, they never talk about what leaders seven generations later will have to do, he said.

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The new party only began forming two weeks ago, after receiving 165 signatures of support from Whitehorse alone.

They received official registration from Elections Yukon on Tuesday, September 6. And the party platform is still taking form, said Dickson.

He knows it's short notice, but the goal is to get the ball rolling, he said.

"I just want to see change, even if nothing really happens right now," he said. "At least someone, down the road, might get in or be accepted. We need to try and make a difference. Maybe it will wake up the First Nations too. For me, I don't care. I got nothing to lose. It's what the elders wanted. For now, I just wanted to let people know what we're doing and what it's all about."

- reprinted from the Yukon News

Region: Yukon Territory ^[2]

Tags: election ^[3]

