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**Will the gang of eight punch above their weight? ( Editorial )**

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By [Whitehorse Star](#) on November 10, 2011 at 6:22 pm

If, as the territory's new Minister of Economic Development, Currie Dixon wants to consult with the Minister of Environment, he'll be able to do so instantaneously, for that minister is guaranteed to be in his shaving mirror.

In one of the more curious complexions to Premier Darrell Pasloski's cabinet crafting, the same man oversees two portfolios which frequently carry stiffly competing objectives.

Some will wonder how dedicated Dixon can be toward the responsible protection of the Peel watershed, for example, if he, along with the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (EMR), has a vested political interest in limited development in that region.

Conversely, a new set of critics will wonder how Dixon can devote himself to a given region's economic development potential if he also speaks as the Minister of Environment.

The Peel file, as well as clusters of other subjects where development and conservation philosophies clash head-on, stand to leave the young minister in no-win political predicaments. His extensive studies in political science and his experience as a ministerial executive assistant will stand him in good stead.

Pasloski has taken advantage of the fact that one of his ministers (Elaine Taylor) has nine years' experience, another (Brad Cathers) seven years in a cabinet, and a third (Doug Graham) with several years' ministerial experience a generation ago.

Not to be overlooked is Scott Kent's familiarity with the cabinet table, for he sat there as a Liberal from 2000 to 2002.

Taylor's pleasant-natured diplomacy will serve her well at Community Services.

There are perennially dozens of municipal demands to attend to, including the controversies in the evolving Whistle Bend subdivision.

Similarly, the Public Service Commission portfolio can have its own prickly characteristics should the government and its employees lapse into an entrenched estrangement over contract negotiations.

Cathers assumes responsibilities for the Yukon Energy Corp., the entity he accused former premier Dennis Fentie of looking to sell off amid his noisy resignation from the cabinet in 2009.

Graham, a member of former government leader Chris Pearson's cabinet of the late 1970s and early '80s, will no doubt have his hands full with the high-spending Department of Health and Social Services. He got off to a positive start in promising to meet with the family of a Copper Ridge Place resident who was sexually assaulted during the past summer. An ex-city councillor, he will likely be a valuable source of guidance for Taylor at Community Services.

Kent takes on enormous responsibilities with Education and the Yukon Housing Corp.

The recent election campaign's most high-profile issue – the chronic shortage of housing for average citizens and those haunted by substance abuse issues and homelessness – has generated immediate action.

On Tuesday, the government announced it's seeking expressions of interest from the private sector to expand the affordable housing stock, notably on a chunk of land alongside Mountainview Drive.

Meanwhile, Education – never a shrinking violet – carries the volatility of the legal fight between the government and the territory's francophone school board, a file that will require carefully-weighted compromises if there ever was one. Ironically, Kent was a member of the only government to have confronted educators' job action during his tenure as a Liberal.

Since no lawyers were elected Yukon Party MLAs on Oct. 11, the crucial Justice portfolio had to go to a non-lawyer. As predecessor Marian Horne did, Mike Nixon contemplates a steep learning curve.

With \$70 million-plus already having been spent on a new jail complex, Nixon will also have to grapple with the financial and logistical implications of the federal government's determination to imprison more offenders for longer periods.

The premier was wise to add only one other portfolio to Nixon's load – Tourism, which, though vital to the economy, won't demand as many hours of ministerial toil as Justice will.

With less than 20 per cent of the Yukon Party caucus comprised of women, it was a foregone conclusion that the cabinet would be overwhelmingly male.

But, in an area where he had more flexibility (ministers' geographical backgrounds), Pasloski has chosen a team which is Whitehorse-centric.

Only Wade Istchenko represents a true rural riding (though Cathers holds Lake Laberge). Two of the three Yukon Party MLAs not invited into the cabinet are rurally-based – Patti McLeod (Watson Lake) and Stacey Hassard (Pelly-Nisutlin).

That may cause some disgruntlement in the communities, but the objective has to be creating the best-governed territory possible.

That translates to installing the best people to the most appropriate jobs.

With the pomp and ceremony committed to history, the hard, five-year slog of serious work begins.