

OPINION

ILLEGITIMUS NON CARBORUNDUM

ESTABLISHED 1900

Destination disaster: confine this flight to the runway

"Wisdom outweighs any wealth."

— Sophocles

Centuries later, it's all enough to make Athens' great tragic playwright wince.

Consider: the Yukon is ruled by a territorial administration that spends \$1.5 billion a year on the needs of fewer than 40,000 people.

Taxpayers now spend \$500 million a year on its employees. A \$200-million widening of the Whitehorse portion of the Alaska Highway was envisioned just a couple of years back. Meanwhile, \$75-million school, jail and hospital expansion projects have become routine.

Yet, amid the swirling gales of hundreds of millions of annual dollars, a consultant has suggested the government save some money by *closing five emergency airstrips*.

Beyond belief?

Nope. No joke.

This is not some bizarre, 3:23 a.m. tweet emanating from the White House as a ludicrous method to discourage aerial invasions of the United States.

This is masquerading as supposedly enlightened, modern-times "advice". It essentially counsels the government that potentially endangering lives is less important than the cost of pulling a few willows, doing some weed control, and filling some holes caused by rain and runoff.

What the government does with this notion of sensible aviation system management will provide a revealing glimpse about whether it's more interested in listening to members of the aviation community — who strongly know what they're talking about — or

for the strips' demise.

Doubtless, the priority they place on bean-counting would be swiftly revised if they were passengers in an aircraft suddenly obliged to depend on one of the strips.

Causes could range from a crippling mechanical failure or the pilot's sudden, incapacitating illness, to the abrupt onset of threatening flying conditions.

On Monday, the *Star* quoted a pilot describing the unpredictability of the weather and the scarcity of reliable forecasts.

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If it weren't for the security of knowing the airstrips are there and ready to serve, he said, many of his flights would never have taken place.

Multiply that experience among other Yukon pilots, and the daily commerce flow begins to become compromised — surely a ramification a money-conscious government would swiftly note.

If the government is reluctant to place credence in an experienced pilot's reflections, it ought to consider the valid anxieties expressed by the Yukon chapter of the Canadian Owners and Pilot's Association.

The president is veteran pilot Rick Nielsen, who happens to be the son of Erik Nielsen, a famed aviator

and former deputy prime minister of Canada. Northern aviation wisdom has flowed deep in this family's veins for generations.

Assuming the government isn't immune from Murphy's law, can you just *imagine* the litigation costs to the public if a gravel strip was shut down, an area crash ensued, and there was a strong belief the plane could have achieved an emergency landing on the strip?

A religious-like zeal for nickel-and-diming may have its role in some environments. It has *no* place in the Yukon's vast skies and among the pilots and passengers who use them.

A short-sighted government is one that becomes ideologically captured by its bureaucrats and consultants. It carelessly casts aside concerns about Yukon and visiting pilots' safety, and seizes upon a rash, naive and downright *perilous* ploy to claw back a miniscule amount of money.

An intelligent government is attentive to the security of the population it serves — including small numbers of aviators in obscure parts of the Yukon. It's one that will send this recommendation spiralling to a well-deserved crash-landing.

The Liberals should concentrate on the enhancement and improvement of the territory's aviation infrastructure, not preside over its dangerous degradation.

*Gleg
Kaby*

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MAGAZINE COVER FOR TRUDEAU...



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What the government does with this notion of sensible aviation system management will provide a revealing glimpse about whether it's more interested in listening to members of the aviation community – who strongly know what they're talking about – or making a tiny shaving from the annual-aviation services maintenance budget.

To justify the foolhardy carving-up of a reliable safety network on the basis that the strips aren't often used is being preposterously reckless about the coveted value of human life.

Locomotives have "dead man's" throttles and emergency brakes. Tractor-trailer units have escape ramps in mountainous regions.

Yet now we're having a conversation about depriving pilots of a part of *their* safety precautions? The proponents of this incomprehensible folly seem to have no grasp of the concept of *insurance*.

Billions of people around the world pay premiums to protect against catastrophic events against their lives, their health, their property and their vehicles – and never have to use the product they're buying. Using the aviation consultant's logic, this insurance would be eliminated on that basis.

The airstrips' presence represents an important parallel.

As is so often the case, this is a scenario where life experience is likely the only factor powerful enough to instill common sense into the minds of those advocating

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