

Ballard named Ontario Environment Minister



By Brock Weir

Newmarket-Aurora MPP Chris Ballard was appointed Ontario's new Minister of the Environment and Climate Change on Monday by Premier Kathleen Wynne.

The Aurora resident, who was serving as the Province's Minister of Housing and Minister Responsible for Poverty Reduction, succeeds MPP Glen Murray to the portfolio.

As a native of King Township, Ballard grew up living on the Oak Ridges Moraine.

As an MPP, and earlier as a municipal councillor, he was a particularly vocal champion of its preservation. Now that very preservation rests, in part, in his portfolio, a twist of fate he describes as "so wonderful."

"I would call myself an outdoors guy and to be in a portfolio where I can have real influence on preserving green space and preserving the environment and helping people deal with climate change has absolutely made my day," Mr. Ballard told The Auroran shortly after Monday's cabinet shuffle.

"Standing up to the environment, which I had a reputation for doing on Aurora Town Council as well, really advocating that a strong and healthy natural environment means stronger and healthier human beings is an understanding I have had from the time I was a kid running through the fields of King Township, fishing and hiking the East Humber River. Until today I have seen too much of a decline in that quality of life and I am really excited to be able to make some contributions to reversing that trend."

Hitting the ground running this week, he says his immediate focus now and into the fall will be communicating with Ontarians about all the "good things that have come out of legislation that has been passed by the government related to the environment and climate change.

These, he said, include the cap and trade system which has allowed for the investment of \$1.9 billion into green projects, investing in the expansion of the GO Train network, incentives for electric vehicles and housing retrofit programs which will help homeowners save money and combat climate change.

"We have put \$100 million into home retrofits to help people reduce their energy costs," he said. "We're putting \$200 million into public schools for furnaces, windows and lights. The list goes on and I compare that to what the opposition has been calling for and I think ours is a far more solid fiscal one that costs taxpayers a lot less money and is far more effective.

"My initial goal will be to continue working on communications, working on getting our message out to people and to continue travels across Ontario to listen to what people are talking about and listen to what is important in their lives and to better understand how the government through policy in my new ministry how that policy can help make their lives better."

There will also be the challenge of addressing climate change in an era where Canada's neighbours to the south have a commitment to the fight that is currently on life support. That roadblock, however, is at the top, and Mr. Ballard said. "It is important to understand that there's plenty of fight still with state legislators.

"They are more committed than ever to climate change," he said. "We will continue to work closely with California and they are a big influencer. They are not backing off from their climate change activities. We are all part of the cap and trade system together.

While some people may not be enthusiastic, my sense is the vast majority of the space where the real work gets done when it comes to climate change initiatives, quite frankly, will continue to move ahead. Climate Change is such a big topic. We have been talking about it exhaustively for 15 or 20 years.

?I need to continue to make sure people understand the gravity of the situation but at the same time I don't want to overwhelm people; I want people to know there is a pathway out. Working together, all of us, there is a pathway through this and we can do it together.?

Monday's cabinet shuffle was sparked by the resignation of Glen Murray who, although no longer in Cabinet, will continue to serve as MPP in his Toronto riding.

?With the resignation of Glen Murray from cabinet, we are taking advantage of the depth of talent in our caucus and making sure that our government can continue to work together to make a difference in people's lives,? said Premier Wynne in a statement. ?I want to thank Glen for the dedication he has always shown to his constituents and to people across Ontario as a cabinet minister. I also want to thank the ministers appointed today for taking on these new responsibilities. I know the entire team looks forward to working together in this cabinet to build a fairer, better Ontario.?

Peter Milczyn, MPP for Etobicoke-Lakeshore, succeeds Ballard as Minister of Housing.