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New year will bring new climate-change strategy for Ontario: Murray

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If it's now or never, the province is choosing now to put together a new climate-change plan.

Environment and Climate Change Minister **Glen Murray**, in New York for a UN environmental summit this week, said a new strategy is currently being developed and should be completed for 2015.

"We will launch that strategy in the new year," Murray told *QP Briefing*. "I think it will paint a very positive future for Ontario and for the planet and it will also outline what we need to avoid and how we avoid it."

The new strategy, which will have input from other Cabinet ministers and the public, will replace the province's Climate Ready action plan that expires at the end of 2014.

Murray's mandate letter from the premier, published Thursday, asks him to "lead the development of a new long term climate change strategy for Ontario."

"This strategy will be forward looking to 2050 and will contain an action plan to help our government achieve its greenhouse gas reduction targets for 2020," the instructions read.

Murray floated a few examples of items that could be part of the incoming report, like transportation infrastructure and a healthy soils strategy. Creating healthier soils isn't normally thought of as having an impact, he explained, "but that is greenhouse-gas emissions reductions."

The ruling Liberals have made the environment a key part of their focus, phasing out coal-fired power plants and expanding wind and solar generation to help cut greenhouse-gas emissions. They have also promoted more stringent cleaner fuel standards and want steelmakers, cement producers and other big industries to cut their emissions.

Murray has spent some of his time in New York trying to cobble together further climate partnerships with U.S. states such as California, which has long demanded cleaner-fuel standards. Tasks like greening the auto

industry are made easier with broader, heftier coalitions – or so the thinking goes.

"We're not going to be making internal combustion engine cars in 10 years, (that's) unlikely, in North America," Murray said. "We have to switch our auto platform to these new clean carbon-neutral vehicles that are now emerging and are commercially viable."

Murray said California is leading the way, with electric-vehicle maker Tesla Motors, an 11-year-old company that has a US\$30-billion value and only recently began making cars. General Motors, he added, has a market cap of \$56 billion.

So Ontario, with its large automotive production capacity, is being looked at by Quebec and states like New York to see if they can produce electric vehicles, Murray said.

"We also realized you have to have a big enough market, a big enough population base, to shift from fossil fuel-based cars to carbon-neutral vehicles," he told *QP Briefing*.

Murray has already been working on a climate partnership with Quebec, one he previously said would address the shared economy of the two provinces.

All of this sub-national hobnobbing is a direct result of Ottawa and the U.S. Congress flubbing the climate-change file, Murray said.

"Our federal government is not only not part of the conversation, they're working with countries like Australia to disable the conversation and to prevent us from advancing," he explained, adding Prime Minister **Stephen Harper's** UN climate speech didn't even mention the words "climate change."

The United Nations Climate Summit was a precursor to formal discussions on a climate agreement that is scheduled to take place in December in Lima, and in Paris the following December.

The talk in New York has been ominous. **Rajendra K. Pachauri**, the chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, summed up his group's fifth assessment report with three points: that human influence on the climate is clear; that quick action is needed "to avoid increasingly destructive outcomes"; and that humans have the means to limit the problem.

The long-stated goal has been to hold the increase in the global average surface temperature to 2 C, something that won't happen "if we carry on business as usual," Pachauri said.

"Moreover, the longer we wait, the higher the risk of severe, widespread and irreversible impacts" on such events as famine and forced migration, Pachauri told the summit.

Murray called unchecked climate change a "catastrophe" that could take untold numbers of human lives.

Premier **Kathleen Wynne** and the Liberals have made fighting climate change a bigger part of their government, something signalled by Murray as the dedicated climate-change minister. The shuttering of coal power plants earned astonishment from others, Murray said.

"There's a strong consensus that when you look at the science ... we are the last generation that has a chance to fix this," Murray said.