



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

## Senator O'Mara's weekly column 'From the Capitol' -- for the week of July 31, 2023 -- 'New York's border crisis continues to worsen'

THOMAS F. O'MARA July 31, 2023

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Senator O'Mara offers his weekly perspective on many of the key challenges and issues facing the Legislature.

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Senator O'Mara offers his weekly perspective on many of the key challenges and issues facing the Legislature, as well as on legislative actions, local initiatives, state programs and

policies, and more. Stop back every Monday for Senator O'Mara's latest column...

This week, "New York's border crisis continues to worsen"

It's no secret that the crisis at the nation's southern border has established an epicenter right here in New York State -- with no end in sight. In fact, it's just beginning.

Since last spring, New York City has received an influx of more than 90,000 migrants. The numbers continue to grow. It has overwhelmed the city's ability to find housing and provide services.

"It's going to get worse before it gets better," New York City Mayor Eric Adams said last week, after having already declared the situation out of control and projecting it will cost the city at least \$4 billion.

That's just for starters -- not only in New York City but across this state, including right here in the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions as Governor Kathy Hochul eyes locations throughout New York for housing shelters to relocate migrants and ease the city's burden.

I'll remind you that, long ago, New York City declared itself a sanctuary city. They opened their arms to shelter undocumented immigrants. They asked for it and they should not, now, push their self-created problem to areas of the state that did not. Nor should we be footing the bill for it and, believe me, we are.

The latest comes from an *Albany Times Union* report that the Hochul administration, after securing at least \$1 billion in the new state budget to come to New York City's rescue, has also approved an \$800 million contract with two Texas companies and, apparently, an unidentified third company, to build temporary shelters to house migrants.

The details on the new contract remain sketchy. Why? Because on May 9, shortly after this year's budget was enacted, Governor Hochul issued an executive order formally declaring a "State Disaster Emergency" surrounding the fact that the "arrival of increased numbers of migrants seeking shelter in the City and State of New York is expected to exacerbate an already large-scale humanitarian crisis and create a disaster emergency to which local governments are unable to adequately respond, creating a threat to health and safety, which could result in the loss of life or property."

The troubling significance of this executive order is that it allows the governor to unilaterally authorize "emergency appropriations" that also, incidentally, permit the administration to bypass not only legislative approval but normal competitive bidding requirements and auditing by the state comptroller as well.

In other words, government by emergency executive order has become standard operating procedure for New York's governor, one that allows for the skirting of what would otherwise be fundamental checks and balances in the awarding of state tax dollars.

It continues to echo practices that became commonplace during the COVID-19 pandemic and that led to abuses which, it appears, continue to occur. According to the *Times Union* story, one of the Texas companies made a \$5,000 contribution to the governor's campaign just a week prior to being awarded the migrant housing contract.

Back in May, in a letter to Governor Hochul, our Senate Republican conference wrote, "We are gravely concerned by the lack of transparency around the placement of migrants throughout our state ... Specifically, we would like to know how long migrants will be housed for, where specifically they will be housed, how much is being paid for their housing, and what services they are receiving and for how long. We also request that information about potentially moving migrants is communicated from you or your administration directly to the municipalities."

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In its own examination of the newly revealed migrant housing contract, one fiscal watchdog, the Empire Center for Public Policy, states, "This is just the beginning -- and the Hochul administration's response to the migrant 'emergency' is already raising big questions surrounded by bigger dollar signs ... In the absence of a fuller, ongoing accounting of just what the state is up to, this much seems clear: Hochul's response to the migrant influx emergency is serving as cover for a potentially very costly mess, with no end in sight." (Read the Empire Center's full analysis [HERE](#).)

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