



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Senator O'Mara's weekly column 'From the Capitol' -- for the week of August 28, 2023 -- 'Beware the fallout from the state's addiction to spending'

THOMAS F. O'MARA August 28, 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, "Beware the fallout from the state's addiction to spending"

Reports, including one directly from the state Division of the Budget (DOB) in mid-July, continue to show that New York State will face serious budget shortfalls in the years ahead. According to the DOB's updated financial plan in July, the budget forecast showed cumulative state budget gaps approaching \$40 billion heading into 2027.

“The state’s fiscal outlook has changed considerably over the past year, and significant economic and fiscal risks could further upend the state’s finances,” state Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli said. “The Governor and the Legislature prudently increased New York’s reserve funds, but that cannot replace fiscal discipline or be relied upon to plug recurring budget gaps. While there is no quick fix, a proactive approach by state leaders to align recurring revenues with recurring spending could help preserve the economic competitiveness of our state and avoid cuts to critical programs New Yorkers rely on.”

One prominent state fiscal watchdog, the Empire Center for Public Policy, noted just last week that “the multi-billion-dollar gap Governor Hochul and the Legislature must confront in next year’s state budget appears to be growing larger. The fiscal 2025 budget, for which the governor will present her proposal in January, was already shaping up to be a difficult one before the ink dried on the previous spending plan. The budget approved in May essentially used \$2 billion of cash to cover some of the significant growth in state spending during the current fiscal year and pushed off the question of how to pay for it going forward. To make matters worse, officials based their spending plan on state tax receipts -- which hit new records in 2022 -- remaining unusually high ... but trouble is brewing on the other side of the ledger in the form of higher-than-planned spending. It suggests the budget gap state officials face next year could be creeping past \$10 billion -- and go higher still.”

It all comes down to this: these dire fiscal forecasts are arriving, not only after an unprecedented, multi-year spending spree by Albany Democrats, but also at the same time they have initiated enormous, additional state spending commitments for which they don’t yet know the final price tag. The “trouble brewing” includes the burgeoning migrant crisis that I have highlighted in recent columns, as well increased Medicaid spending (including Medicaid coverage for illegal migrants), and Governor Hochul's recent Executive Order providing free health care to sex workers, aka prostitutes. Not to mention the costs of Albany's Green New Deal with its outrageously costly, full electrification mandates.

In response, New Yorkers are already beginning to see the impact in a variety of ways. Many of us have cautioned that once Governor Hochul and the Legislature's Democrat supermajorities set this out-of-control spending in motion, what follows will inevitably be a never-ending search for more and new sources of revenue including higher taxes, higher fees, and increased borrowing.

You can bet that's where we're headed.

The latest comes with changes, expected to commence in September, to New York's gun and ammunition sales process. Under a new law first included in the SAFE Act a decade ago but made a requirement in 2022 in the enacted Concealed Carry Improvement Act (CCIA), which I opposed, a new statewide license and record database will be created to track gun ownership, as well as a new database focused specifically on ammunition sales.

Beginning in September, the New York State Police becomes the point of contact for background checks for firearm and ammunition purchases. Under the new law, the State Police will oversee and regulate background checks for gun purchases utilizing the FBI's National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS). Everyone purchasing ammunition will have to submit to a background check and provide all your personal information, including your occupation. Licensed firearms dealers and ammunition sellers will be required to contact the State Police to run an ammunition background check.

Finalized details on the new process are forthcoming from the state. However, recent reporting has indicated that new fees will be attached to the background checks for gun purchases (\$9) and each ammunition purchase (\$2.50).

In other words, the state's nickle-and-diming, already a staple of life in New York, could start falling more heavily on law-abiding, responsible gun owners as well as licensed firearms dealers and ammunition sellers.

I oppose this overreach and believe it violates the Constitution, but that is of no concern to the Albany Democrats. My many like-minded colleagues, although in the minority, are hopeful that litigation challenging this further infringement of our constitutional rights will commence forthwith and will be successful.

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Sooner or later, every move that everyday citizens make in New York State will come attached with another tax or a new fee.

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