



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Senator O'Mara's weekly column 'From the Capitol' -- for the week of January 1, 2024 -- 'Renewing the fight for more responsible government'

THOMAS F. O'MARA January 1, 2024

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Senator O'Mara Profile unknown

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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, "**Renewing the fight for more responsible government**"

With this week's start of a new legislative session, we unfortunately continue to face the same set of challenges and crises that many of us fought to address throughout 2023.

In other words, the agenda remains the same. We must stay committed to a comprehensive set of goals to help grow local economies, focus on the affordability crisis facing far too many middle-class families, reform irresponsible state policies and fiscal practices, and to make public safety an urgent priority.

From job creation to tax relief to combating crime, one-party control of New York government has gone off the rails. The Albany Democrat direction for New York simply continues to fail to produce any hope for a long-term, sustainable future for Upstate communities, families, workers, businesses, industries, and taxpayers.

At the opening of the 2023 legislative session last January, when our Senate Republican Conference unveiled a “Rescue New York” agenda, I said, “New York remains one of the highest-taxed states in America. We are one of the most overregulated states in the nation. Our local governments and local property taxpayers continue to foot the bill for one of the country’s heaviest burdens of unfunded state mandates. It’s no coincidence that New York led the nation last year in overall tax burden and population loss. Hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers are heading for the exits. This state is at a crossroads and we must enact an across-the-board agenda to cut taxes, address affordability, and rebuild stronger and safer communities.”

The exact sentiment rings true at the beginning of 2024. This state continues to neglect critical shortcomings, including the need, among many others, to:

- secure a better quality of life for all New Yorkers by making New York more affordable by cutting what are among the nation’s highest tax and debt burdens;
- put a strict cap on state government spending that threatens to make the nation’s highest population losses even worse;
- rethink a process underway to quickly implement clean energy mandates that ignore affordability, feasibility, and sustainability;
- restore public safety as one of the state’s highest responsibilities;

- transform the state-local partnership by making good on a promise made over a decade ago to address the practice of unfunded state mandates;
- fight to protect New York's farmland from solar projects and our scenic vistas from the blight of solar fields;
- finally, fully, and honestly reassess New York's COVID response, including its failures and shortcomings, in order to be better prepared in the future;
- take concrete and serious steps to address New York State's border crisis and the ongoing influx of migrants threatening to overwhelm local and state resources and services;
- combat an exploding fentanyl crisis; and
- restore local decision-making and address abuses of executive power at the state level.

The upcoming legislative session once again presents a pivotal agenda with this state at a troubling crossroads. The state budget under one-party control, for example, has massively accelerated state spending. For the first time, the state budget far surpasses \$200 billion and New York already faces significant budget deficits for the foreseeable future.

Likewise, New Yorkers across the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions, and statewide, are worried about making ends meet. As I have stated many times before, they see this state becoming less safe, less affordable, less free, less economically competitive, less responsible, and far less hopeful for the future.

Albany Democrats acknowledge that New York State has an affordability crisis causing the exodus of our citizens to more affordable states. However, the Democrats have remained intent on increasing government handouts and imposing government mandates in pursuit of their political agenda. They simply have shown no interest in reining in out-of-control

spending, eliminating taxes, lowering costs, cutting burdensome regulations and mandates, or restoring public safety.

It remains, in my view, an overriding priority to take back Upstate's rightful place in this government. We must begin restoring a more responsible and reasonable approach to governing and move away from "one size fits all" legislating.