



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Senator O'Mara's weekly column 'From the Capitol' -- for the week of January 15, 2024 -- 'There's no turnaround in sight'

THOMAS F. O'MARA January 15, 2024

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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, **"There's no turnaround in sight"**

Governor Kathy Hochul opened her State of the State message to the Legislature last week with a surprising proclamation: “The State of New York is stronger, healthier, safer and more affordable than it was two years ago when I became Governor, but there is more work to do.”

In those twenty-nine words, she was incredibly right -- and stunningly wrong -- about where we find ourselves in this state at the moment.

She’s right, there is more work to do. A ton of work. Work that has been neglected for far too long. I remain hopeful, as many of us always are at the start of every new legislative session, that we will finally come to our senses and start addressing this critical work.

But hope gets dashed when a governor sees fit to declare, at this snapshot in time, that New York State has become “stronger, healthier, safer and more affordable” over the past two years under her watch and her partnership with an all-Democrat state Legislature.

It’s simply not true and to say that it is, is to be living in another universe.

In statewide poll after statewide poll over the past several years, New Yorkers have told the governor that they don’t feel safe, that they’re deeply concerned about rising crime and lawlessness.

Every trip to the grocery store, or the gas station (keeping in mind that New York State imposes some of the highest gas taxes in America), or to pay the property tax bill reminds New Yorkers that the cost of living here makes it a struggle to make ends meet.

The outmigration of hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers to other states -- remember, New York has been declared the national leader in population loss -- has weakened the fabric of this state, not made it stronger.

Consequently, at the outset, let’s set aside that characterization of the state of New York. We are not stronger. We are not safer. We are not more affordable. Far from it.

The deeper concern, for me, is that the Albany Democrats don’t get it and that the work they’re about to do is far from the work that needs to be done. Governor Hochul unveils her 2024-2025 proposed state budget on Tuesday. We’ll get a better idea of the direction she intends to take New York, although her State of the State message provided a few hints.

“The governor mentions affordability more than 60 times in her policy book, but unfortunately, most of the solutions involve shifting costs rather than reducing them,” said Empire Center CEO Tim Hofer.

“While the governor touched on some issues that New Yorkers can relate to and care about, she failed to put forward meaningful tax relief or pro-growth reforms that would reverse our state’s decline ... The state’s policies are making it more expensive to drive a car, turn on a light, and heat our homes,” said Upstate United Executive Director Justin Wilcox.

“Small businesses, like every New Yorker, are facing an affordability crisis ... more must be done to help Main Street,” said National Federation of Independent Business New York State Director Ashley Ranslow.

Consequently, when Governor Hochul gets to work this week with the biggest-spending Legislature in state history on a new budget, the warning signs are flashing. Since taking complete control of the purse strings of New York government five years ago, these Democrats have increased state spending by upwards of \$60 billion! Odds are that even with New York currently facing multi-year, multi-billion-dollar state budget deficits -- including a budget gap this year projected to be more than \$4 billion -- state spending will continue to skyrocket and remain unaffordable and unsustainable.

It's all pointing to even harder times ahead for state and local taxpayers, small businesses and manufacturers, and already hard-pressed upstate communities, economies, families, and workers.

Despite all the alarms going off, there will be no let-up. There will be no turnaround. The ongoing Albany Democrat mandate of huge state spending handouts will wipe out any realistic hope for an affordable, sustainable, thriving future for most New Yorkers.

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