



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Senator O'Mara's weekly column 'From the Capitol' -- for the week of March 4, 2024 -- 'State's energy policies need another look'

THOMAS F. O'MARA March 4, 2024

| ISSUE: **CLCPA; CLEAN ENERGY MANDATES**



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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, **"State's energy policies need another look"**

A few weeks ago at the Capitol, Senate and Assembly Republicans held a “Pump the Brakes” news conference to highlight the latest concern gaining momentum that the Albany Democrat climate agenda is a perfect storm of unaffordability, unfeasibility and unreliability on the horizon for all New Yorkers.

Specifically, we focused on the fast-moving state energy mandate that will require, starting in 2027, all school buses purchased in this state to be electric. We stood together with representatives of local school districts, including Horseheads Central School District Superintendent, Dr. Thomas Douglas, to put a spotlight on how this mandate will be enormously expensive for school and local taxpayers, it will not be workable, and, most importantly, it won’t be reliable and safe for students and families. (Note: You can find out more about this mandate and view the recent news conference on my Senate website, www.omara.ny.senate).

The all-electric school buses mandate, keep in mind, is just one of numerous energy mandates already in the state’s pipeline and on the way to hit all New Yorkers very hard in the very near future.

The overriding point for those of us who have been warning about these looming mandates for several years is not that we don’t believe New York State should be moving toward cleaner and more renewable energy, because that’s simply not the truth. We do believe it and, in fact, have supported actions that have already made New York State a nation-leading champion in this arena. We should be proud of that reality.

Our overriding point is that this new strategy, unleashed by Albany Democrats following the approval of the "Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act" (CLCPA) in 2019, is being pursued without Governor Hochul and her energy czars having a clear-cut idea what it will cost New Yorkers, nor whether it’s feasible, reliable, or remotely realistic.

A new analysis from the Empire Center, “Green Guardrails: Guiding New York’s Drive to Lower Emissions,” once again sounds the alarm on these very real shortcomings. It’s worthwhile reading.

According to the report, “The process that has played out in the five years since the law’s passage has been marred by a lack of transparency, with state officials failing to issue legally required cost estimates and crucial studies designed to guide state energy policy. There is growing evidence that the state will be unable to achieve its goals without significantly affecting the cost of living and doing business in New York and harming the reliability of its electric grid.”

In other words, if we stay the current course and keep blindly moving forward at breakneck speed to impose far-reaching, politically driven energy mandates, despite the warning lights blinking across countless dashboards, it will be disastrous for ratepayers and taxpayers, businesses and industries, school districts, farmers, local economies, and so many more.

The latest Empire Center report warns that the costs to New Yorkers could well prove to be over \$1 trillion by 2050 -- and that's in a state already recognized as one of the nation's least affordable places to live, one of America's highest taxed and regulated states, and the state that is losing population faster than any other in the country. It has been set in motion by state leaders whose "approach to these goals is, however, deeply flawed. The Climate Act leaves the bulk of the decisions about how emissions will be reduced to state agencies under direct control of the governor, vesting them with policymaking powers that are supposed to be reserved for New York's senators and assemblymembers."

The Empire Center's bottom line is that the current strategy demands a reassessment and reexamination, and I could not agree more. It's exactly what many of us have been calling for from the beginning.

Back to the all-electric school bus mandate. It is projected to be the most expensive unfunded state mandate to ever hit local school districts and property taxpayers. The cost of the conversion has been conservatively estimated at between \$8 billion and \$15.25 billion *more* than the cost of replacing them with new diesel buses. I have introduced legislation (S8220/A8447), sponsored in the state Assembly by area Assemblyman Phil Palmesano, to immediately delay this mandate and do what should have been done BEFORE passing the CLCPA: undertake a thorough cost-benefit analysis; take other actions to ensure affordability, feasibility, and reliability; and be forthright with taxpayers and ratepayers on what this is going to cost them.

That's an approach we should be taking across the board to try to avoid what can only be seen now as a disaster in the making.

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