



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Senator O'Mara's weekly column 'From the Capitol' -- for the week of March 10, 2025 -- 'During prison crisis, Albany ideology overruling common sense'

THOMAS F. O'MARA March 10, 2025

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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, "During prison crisis, Albany ideology overruling common sense"

Weekly Column from

NYS SENATOR TOM O'MARA

for the week of March 10, 2025

“During prison crisis, Albany ideology overruling common sense”

Over the past several years, New York State has become notorious for politically driven, far-left ideology overriding reality, ideology overruling common sense, and, ultimately, ideology overturning the common good.

That's been true on immigration, climate, fiscal practices, criminal justice, and other arenas of public policy which have become dominated by the one-party, largely far-left, highly politicized control of government.

The current crisis in our correctional facilities is now the prime example.

Striking correctional officers have made it eminently clear what the danger is here: chaos and breakdown.

Not long ago, our Senate [REDACTED] minority conference met with spouses and other family members of these same correctional officers, and they made it clear in the most compelling ways.

Last week outside the state Capitol, while the Hochul administration continued to move to fire officers, terminate their families' health insurance, and threaten fines and even imprisonment, hundreds of correctional officers and their families and supporters kept making it clear again at a rally: Your ideology was wrong. It can't work. It has upended any shred of law and order within our facilities, which have become violent, dangerous, and life-threatening.

As of this writing, the strike remains ongoing and in constant uncertainty. What cannot change in any eventual outcome, however, is the need to admit that one Albany [REDACTED] majority policy in particular has been a failure, as predicted from the outset by many of us from the very time it was enacted. This crisis has been years in the making, going back over a decade when then-Governor Andrew Cuomo began rapidly closing prisons throughout New York and thereby putting enormous strain on the remaining system – and it will take years now to hopefully restore the system.

The New York State Correctional Officers & Police Benevolent Association (NYSCOPBA) began holding rallies across New York in early 2022 calling for the law's repeal. I joined officers at many of these rallies, as did many of my legislative colleagues.

NYSCOPBA President Michael Powers said in 2022: "As we have said for years, the HALT Act would only do one thing, make our correctional facilities more dangerous. The New York State Legislature, the people who created this poorly thought-out legislation are directly responsible for the skyrocketing violence we're experiencing in our prisons today. They ignored our warnings, our pleas to educate themselves properly before passing HALT, and now they've put the lives of everyone who resides or works in a correctional setting at risk."

That's exactly what has brought us here today: Albany [REDACTED] majorities ignored our warnings, our pleas to educate themselves properly before passing HALT, and they put the lives of everyone who resides or works in a correctional setting at risk.

Three years later, inmate assaults on staff have doubled and inmate-on-inmate assaults have nearly tripled, highlighting an escalating trend of rising violence inside prison walls while ongoing prison closures, staffing shortages, and unreasonable and unrealistic mandatory overtime demands have forced officers to work in conditions far beyond any semblance of balance and fairness for them and their families and loved ones. The vast majority of correctional officers and staff within the Elmira Correctional Facility and Five Points Correctional Facility, both of which I represent, and at facilities throughout the state, kept going to work mandatory regular day off shift upon mandatory overtime shift, often 24-hour-plus tours, day after day, night after night, month after month, year after year, to undertake the duties and responsibilities they're charged with diligently, professionally, and respectfully in an ever increasingly unsafe environment.

Until that just wasn't possible anymore. Until it just wasn't SAFE anymore. Until they finally decided that yet another misguided Albany [REDACTED] majority policy was not more important, could not be more important than their personal safety, the overall security of their facilities, and the future of their families and loved ones.

I, my [REDACTED] colleagues, and corrections officers have repeatedly warned Albany [REDACTED] majorities over the past three years that the situation was a powder keg. This strike is the resultant explosion.

So far, Albany [REDACTED] majorities have kept their sense of reality and the truth buried under their ideology.

Consequently, we face a correctional system in crisis and on the brink of a collapse.

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