



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

## O'Mara, Senate GOP call for stronger state commitment to water quality: Budget proposal will include \$5-billion Clean Water Bond Act, establish Drinking Water Quality Institute

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**Elmira, N.Y., March 13**—State Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats) and his Senate Republican colleagues today called for the approval of \$5-billion “Clean Water Bond Act,” the establishment of a “Drinking Water Quality Institute” and other initiatives to enhance and

speed up the state's efforts to improve drinking water safety and water quality infrastructure for all New Yorkers

O'Mara said that the Senate proposals, totaling \$8 billion, will be included in a "one-house" budget plan being acted on by the Senate this week. New York State's budget adoption process gets under way in earnest next week with both the Senate and Assembly set to adopt their respective versions of what should be included in the final, 2017-2018 state budget.

O'Mara, Chair of the Senate Environmental Conservation Committee, said, "We know that the many challenges surrounding water quality are here to stay. Consequently, these Senate recommendations are clearly among the top priorities in 2017. These proposed actions focus on helping localities undertake vital and long-overdue water infrastructure projects, including sewer and municipal water line repairs, and fully recognize that drinking water quality concerns and crises regionally, statewide and across the nation have become increasingly acute. It's a timely, commonsense budget strategy that makes great environmental, fiscal and economic sense."

Senate Majority Leader John J. Flanagan said, "Communities throughout the state are struggling with the growing problems of contaminated water supplies, major infrastructure failures, and other threats that jeopardize public health and constrain the economy. The Senate's budget plan takes bold and necessary steps towards providing the resources our state desperately needs to ensure the long-term safety of our drinking water and wastewater infrastructure."

Senator Kemp Hannon (R-Nassau), Chair of the Senate Health Committee, said, "The Senate's budget proposal incorporates the important lessons we have learned from intense study of the many water quality challenges facing our state. We believe more funding is essential,

increasing the state's financial commitment with a Bond Act to upgrade deficient infrastructure, while also ensuring that sound, scientific expertise provided by the Drinking Water Quality Institute will protect the public from existing and emerging contaminants.”

The Senate plan includes:

- > the creation of a \$5-billion Clean Water Bond Act to provide critical funds for many different types of projects to prevent contamination that endangers public health and safety, clean up pollution, protect water sources, and promote the growth of the economy through infrastructure investment;
- > support for \$2 billion to establish the Water Quality Infrastructure Improvement Act of 2017 to immediately fund necessary improvements that meet the varying needs of communities statewide. If the proposed \$5-billion bond act receives voter approval, that funding would be added to what remains of the proposed \$2 billion to ensure more infrastructure needs are met under a quicker timeframe than one proposed earlier this year by Governor Andrew Cuomo.
- > establishment of a Drinking Water Quality Institute comprised of public health experts, scientists, water purveyors, and the commissioners of state departments of Health and Environmental Conservation. The Institute would be charged with setting New York-specific standards for unregulated contaminants that are at least as stringent as federal health advisories; developing a list of contaminants for which testing is required by public water suppliers; and establishing a clear notification process for municipalities, state agencies, and the public. New York must do all it can to err on the side of caution when it comes to contaminants in our drinking water;

- > creation of the “Emerging Contamination Monitoring Act” to better protect public health and establish safety thresholds for drinking water contaminants;
- > support for \$300 million for the state’s Environmental Protection Fund (EPF);
- > continued funding for the existing Water Quality Infrastructure Investment Program, which, over the past two years after Senate Republicans successfully fought for its establishment in 2015, has provided critical state assistance to help localities undertake water and environmental infrastructure improvement projects. This year’s Senate proposal supports the continuation of \$175 million for 2017-2018 to provide municipal grants – the last of a \$400-million, three-year commitment - for the replacement and repair of existing wastewater infrastructure and drinking water infrastructure; and
- > ongoing funding for state-administered Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds that provide low-cost financing and grants for the construction of water system projects and drinking water improvements in disadvantaged communities. A total of \$205 million would be provided for the Clean Water State Revolving Fund and \$70 million for the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund.

Following the adoption of this week’s one-house budget plans, the Senate and Assembly will convene public, joint budget conference committees to begin ironing out differences before entering into final budget negotiations with the governor. A new state budget is scheduled to take effect on April 1, the start of New York’s new fiscal year.