



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Senator O'Mara's weekly column 'From the Capitol' ~ for the week of October 12, 2020 ~ 'It's a priority to rebuild and restore Upstate's voice in Albany'

THOMAS F. O'MARA October 12, 2020

| ISSUE: **UPSTATE NEW YORK**



One thing is absolutely clear, Upstate needs to reclaim a voice in this state government.

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, "It's a priority to rebuild and restore Upstate's voice in Albany"

One of state government's leading advocates for the future of the Southern Tier, Finger Lakes and the Upstate New York region, is a group called Unshackle Upstate.

Not long ago, Unshackle Upstate put forth a plan called "Fast Forward – A Rapid Recovery Plan for the Upstate Economy" that you can read more about on www.unshackleupstate.com.

Unshackle Upstate Chairman Brian Sampson highlighted the plan's guiding message, "Rather than waiting on Washington to save the day, there are things state officials can do right now that will help rebuild our economy and revive our communities. Unshackle Upstate's Fast Forward agenda will give a much-needed boost to small businesses, family farms and taxpayers across the Upstate region."

Unshackle Upstate has become a leading voice in the halls of Albany where Upstate's voice has been steadily diminished over the past several years as downstate, so-called "progressive" powers that be have taken control and advanced a one-party, one-region agenda that cuts right to heart of the Upstate economy and way of life, in my opinion.

This warning against the dangers of one-party control – which does away with any strong measure of legislative checks and balances – should not be taken lightly. At the moment, we're all paying for it in a variety of misguided and dangerous ways, from the onerous bail reform that has made streets and neighborhoods less safe, to the creation of an unelected, unaccountable Farm Wage Board that threatens the future of family farms.

Back on April 3, at the outset of the COVID-19 shutdown, when this state government under one-party control was putting the final touches on a new state budget, I warned against the short- and, equally important, long-term consequences that were at stake by enacting a budget packed with far too many "progressive" (aka "extreme liberal") policy actions that should never have been part of this budget given the looming public health crisis or, truthfully, at any time.

These actions included using taxpayer dollars to finance political campaigns to the tune of more than \$200 million per every of the state's two-year election cycles; new mandates on economic development projects receiving state incentives that will impose devastating cost increases on many already-hard-pressed Upstate employers; taking away local decision-making, including bypassing local zoning, in the siting of future renewable energy projects like wind and solar farms; and eliminating a proposed small business tax cut while continuing a tax cut for the Hollywood film industry worth \$420 million annually.

In response, on April 3, I stated, "Upstate does not get a fair shake in this budget. It is the product of one-party, downstate Democrat control of state government, period. It will add fiscal and economic

burdens on top of a pandemic already falling hard on Upstate New York communities, economies, governments, schools, taxpayers, and workers. We could and should have enacted a budget that simply kept this state running and meeting its obligations throughout this emergency. Then, once we weathered this storm, we could get to work assessing the damage, determining who and what needs repair, better calculate the federal response, and have an open and full discussion on the best way to move forward for this entire state, Upstate and downstate. That would have been common sense. That would have been responsible. That would have been fair. That's not what happened here."

I added, "For Upstate, in addition to doing our part to beat the pandemic, we are going to have to confront picking up the pieces of this budget and that's what we will do in the months ahead. One thing is absolutely clear, Upstate needs to reclaim a voice in this state government."

All of the above is just as true today as it was nearly seven months ago, maybe moreso.

More recently, Unshackle Upstate's chairman expressed the urgency for getting the economy back on track working together with like-minded state legislators who "share two important goals: strengthening the Upstate economy and saving our Upstate communities."

He added, "Now, more than ever, we need to elect legislators who will ease the burdens of taxpayers and employers. We strongly believe that (Tom O'Mara) will do just that. (He knows) that our taxes are too high and our business climate is too harsh."

He's right.

I have steadily worked together with Unshackle Upstate on common goals we have long shared for the Southern Tier, Finger Lakes, and all of Upstate. We continue to share the commitment to restoring Upstate's rightful place in New York government -- for the sake of Upstate taxpayers, workers, manufacturers, farmers, small business owners, and our local communities and economies overall.

Once this election season concludes, this State Legislature needs to hit the ground running to thoroughly assess, straightforwardly and honestly, the damage that's been done and determine how we build the right road back.

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