



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Senator O'Mara's weekly column 'From the Capitol' ~ for the week of October 19, 2020 ~ 'Setting common goals and finding common ground'

THOMAS F. O'MARA October 19, 2020

| ISSUE: **LOCAL GOVERNMENT SUPPORT**



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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, "Setting common goals and finding common ground"

Back in late March and early April, which seems like an eternity ago now, I thought (and still do think) that one important priority was to do my best to steadily acknowledge the absolute army of public and private officials, community organizations and institutions, and local volunteers who were showing up on the frontlines, day after day after day, to respond to COVID-19.

What a remarkable effort it was then and continues to be now. And I'll take this chance to salute it again.

Chief among those who served as a front line of defense for all of us were the men and women of local public health departments across this legislative district in Chemung, Schuyler, Steuben, Tompkins and Yates counties. Facing unprecedented pressures and uncertainties, they summoned the absolute best that we could ever ask of public servants.

We owe them a great debt of gratitude.

They're still doing the very same work at this moment. We're not out of the woods yet, as we all should recognize by now. Consequently, it remains absolutely important to keep paying attention to our local public health warnings as positive cases of COVID-19 spike in Chemung, Steuben and across the region.

The bottom line: It took great pain, perseverance, loss and sacrifice to get to a point where we could truly begin reopening and looking ahead – we cannot afford to risk throwing away the gains made over the past eight months.

That means, first and foremost, paying attention to local health public department reminders on safety and responsibility.

Thank you for your continued cooperation and teamwork.

On that note, I've been writing in this space lately about the idea of teamwork as one of this region's greatest assets and strengths. That's because it has always worked for us, it's working now when we've needed it most, and now is no time to turn our backs on it as a fundamental of government moving forward.

It's worth repeating: I have been grateful over many years to join legislative colleagues across the region, at every level of government, every step of the way, to build the partnerships and the cooperation that ultimately make the difference on the ground for the communities we represent. County executives and managers, city and village mayors, town supervisors, local highway superintendents, first responders, not-for-profit service providers, you name it and here at home, we enjoy a healthy tradition of trying to always build these collaborative federal-state-local efforts to strengthen the foundations of local communities. We look to join together to set goals, identify and solve problems, and work cooperatively to achieve important projects on priorities and common goals.

This ongoing teamwork will certainly be critical to our success in the months and years ahead, which promise to be as difficult as any we have ever faced.

I recently joined Congressman Tom Reed and other regional lawmakers for an important roundtable discussion in Elmira, outdoors under the pavilion at Eldridge Park, with regional law enforcement and community leaders. The discussion focused on this time of unrest and how communities like ours can join together to respond in ways that can make us better and stronger.

One key participant, Elmira-Corning Branch NAACP President Georgia Verdier, a longtime voice of leadership in our region, said, "I found (the roundtable) to be thought-provoking and effective in terms of having a difficult or perhaps uncomfortable conversation. It provided an opportunity for us to dialogue on matters that impact us all. I believe, if we are to find solutions to issues involving law enforcement and the community, it must begin with mutual respect which can inspire all of us to be the best that we can be."

Schuyler County Sheriff Bill Yessman added, "It's important to collectively discuss issues and potential solutions with other law enforcement executives, lawmakers and members of the public."

In short, it was a good day in a year when good days have been hard to find or count on.

Important insights and constructive dialogue were shared that, we all believe, can help our communities better face differences and challenges. It was civil, it was constructive, and it can make a difference if we maintain it.

It was a positive response, another cornerstone, another building block of the teamwork that can help keep us together and lead us forward.