



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Senator O'Mara's weekly column 'From the Capitol' ~ for the week of August 16, 2021 ~ 'Focusing on a new start and unfinished accountability'

THOMAS F. O'MARA August 16, 2021

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There is enormous work facing us to fix what's broken and keep providing fundamental assistance.

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, **"Focusing on a new start and unfinished accountability"**

After far too long under the darker and darker clouds of a Cuomo administration gone bad, the horizon is finally shining some hope for new leadership at the top of New York State government.

We'll see. Unfortunately, we have to wait until August 24 for this new day to break. Early last week Andrew Cuomo, finally recognizing that his days as governor were over, submitted a two-weeks-notice-type resignation. Why the need for two more weeks is anybody's guess. Soon-to-be Governor Kathy Hochul said that this delay wasn't what she asked for, that she's more than ready to assume the office. Time will tell and she doesn't have much of it. We have a lot of ground to make up from the damage Cuomo has done.

I wrote the following the day after Governor Cuomo announced that he's stepping aside and two days after his top aide Melissa DeRosa's non-resignation statement, "Their misrepresentation, deceit and complete disregard for candor is staggering. They don't deserve 13 more days. Leave now!"

In other words, it's long past time for state government to get refocused on the nuts-and-bolts of governing.

Looking ahead to a Hochul administration, public health with timely and truthful data provided to the public must be the top priority because it is paramount to being able to fully attack the economic crisis that has and is still inflicting enormous pain and upheaval.

A true reopening will be the product of strong regional teamwork on public outreach and care. This teamwork will remain fundamental to our success throughout the months ahead. I am hopeful that the Hochul administration will engage greater teamwork between state and local health officials utilizing their combined experience, and based upon local conditions, and work to repair and strengthen a state and local government working relationship that the Cuomo administration so frequently disregarded since the onset of this pandemic last March.

We will need to keep pushing forward, reopening more and more sectors of local economies, and getting more and more workers back on the job as soon as possible.

On the economic front, we will need the Hochul administration to better recognize that our regional reopening can and must move forward with greater clarity, common sense, and fairness. Many of us here in the region – government officials, business owners, and workers alike -- believe this reopening process can be accomplished more effectively and rapidly without jeopardizing public health. Guidelines that may be absolutely necessary in downstate regions, for example, shouldn't be unreasonably applied upstate.

The same can be said for fully reopening our schools this fall – greater clarity, common sense, and timely guidance.

We will need to redouble our emphasis on this need for fairness. I've had this discussion with many local leaders and citizens. We will continue pushing the new administration to recognize specific regional concerns and suggestions – and the need for sensible compromises and effective, safe resolutions – and we hope to gain a better hearing than we ever did from the Cuomo administration.

There is enormous work facing us to fix what's broken and keep providing fundamental assistance. On the legislative front, we must continue to hear the voices of small business, farming, tourism, manufacturing and other foundations of local economies. Coming out of this COVID-19 response and shutdown, these ongoing discussions, on a bipartisan basis, will become increasingly critical.

That's just part of what we will look forward to when Lieutenant Governor Kathy Hochul officially becomes Governor Kathy Hochul on August 24 and we hear more about her own vision for New York's future.

When Andrew Cuomo announced his resignation last Tuesday, part of my first response was the following, "It is important to move forward. It is also important that all of the investigations into the misconduct and misdeeds of the Cuomo administration be carried out to their fullest extent for the sake of justice. Too many lives have been shattered and everyone responsible for the cover-ups and illegal actions that have come to define this administration must be held accountable."

That's particularly true with any and all of the ongoing investigations into the Cuomo administration's cover-up of COVID-19 deaths in nursing homes and its link to the governor's \$5-million book deal. This cover-up is currently the subject of a federal investigation out of the United States Attorney's Office for the

Eastern District in Brooklyn, as well as an ongoing investigation by the New York State Attorney General and the state Assembly's impeachment inquiry.

These investigations must be carried on and completed. There must be accountability and I believe there will be.

Since early last year, many of my legislative colleagues and I, in both houses of the Legislature and on a bipartisan basis, through our various positions on legislative committees (including my own as the Ranking Member on the Senate Investigations Committee), have done whatever we could to keep a spotlight on this nursing homes travesty.

We don't intend to stop pursuing accountability now just because Andrew Cuomo and his top aides will be clearing out of the Capitol.

Our efforts will continue to help expose the cover-ups, wrongdoing, deception, dishonesty, stonewalling, and whitewashing that, in the end, will come to define the legacy of Andrew Cuomo and his time as governor.

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