



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Senator O'Mara's weekly column 'From the Capitol' -- for the week of August 26, 2024 -- 'Restoring affordability must be a top priority'

THOMAS F. O'MARA August 26, 2024

| ISSUE: **AFFORDABILITY; HIGH TAXES; STATE SPENDING**



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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, **"Restoring affordability must be a top priority"**

The straightforward fact remains that every time New Yorkers go to the grocery store, or the gas station, or to buy back-to-school supplies for their children, or to the mailbox to retrieve their next property tax or utility bill, it's a reminder that New York State is one of the least affordable states in America.

One recent ranking of the least and most expensive states in the nation, the 2024 Cost of Bills Index compiled by Doxo, an online bill payment service, delivered more bad news. The ranking compares average household costs by state and found New York as the seventh most expensive state in the country.

"The cost of living is the amount of money it takes to cover basic expenses," according to one news report summarizing the recent Doxo index. "State and region scores across the country give a snapshot of how expensive it is to live in a place based on earned wages."

In other words, it's a snapshot of what it takes to make ends meet in every state. In that context, it's simply not a Top 10 list that New York government leaders can be proud of or that New York State citizens should be forced to struggle under.

According to the latest "affordability" ranking compiled by U.S. News & World Report, New York State ranks 45th in the nation, right near the bottom, in affordability. And earlier this year, a USA Today Homefront report found "the Empire State ranked dead last in the rankings when it comes to overall affordability."

According to USA Today, "We analyzed median incomes and five basic expenses: home ownership costs, groceries, health care, income tax and gasoline. We defined affordability by looking at expenses as a percentage of the respective state's median income."

I have heard it constantly and continually from families, taxpayers, working men and women, small business owners, and many others throughout the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions: They are worried about making ends meet and they have been for a long time now. They have watched this state become less affordable. They have felt it become less free. They believe it to be less economically competitive, less responsible, and far less hopeful for the future.

There may very well be many Albany Democrats who acknowledge that our state faces an affordability crisis, one that has caused the exodus of hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers to more affordable states (keep in mind that we lead the nation in population loss. According to the latest figures from the U.S. Census Bureau, over the three years from 2020 to last year, New York led the nation in population loss with more than 533,000 people leaving, a nearly three percent

decline.), have nonetheless remained true to out-of-control spending, high taxes, exorbitant costs and fees for everything under the sun, and burdensome regulations and unfunded state mandates.

New York State's current path is not sustainable. Albany isn't responsible and can't control the ups and downs of every excessive cost facing citizens; however, state government can and should be taking many more actions than it has been to try to ease the burden.

It's a concern, of course, that many of my legislative colleagues and I have steadily worked to highlight as a top priority over the past several years. Throughout this time, New Yorkers have consistently let it be known that the prohibitive cost of living in this state is driving them away.

The warning signs and the alarm bells keep going off. Fiscal watchdogs already project significant state budget deficits in the immediate years ahead, deficits caused, in large measure, by the inability of Governor Hochul and an all-Democrat Legislature to stop overspending. State budget deficits always equal higher costs for all New Yorkers. Footing the bill of budget deficits inevitably falls on taxpayers.

We need to turn New York around, plain and simple. That begins, in my view, by restoring the right priorities in state government, priorities that work toward a more responsible and sustainable future for middle-class communities, families, workers, businesses, industries, and taxpayers. It means focusing on policies being ignored in Albany that prioritize economic growth and job creation, tax relief and regulatory reform, and many other affordability initiatives. It cries out for a comprehensive strategy to ease the financial burden on middle-class families and restore the quality of life in communities statewide through actions like:

--enacting a state spending cap;

--rejecting and eliminating tax increases and unfunded state mandates on local governments and school districts;

--providing across-the-board tax relief;

--rejecting extreme, mandated climate proposals;

--increasing affordable housing options;

--making child care more accessible and affordable;
--improving the state's business climate by protecting small businesses and farms by reducing regulations, and lowering taxes and unfair costs.

New York is a state in decline. We are at a critical crossroads and we must enact an across-the-board agenda to cut taxes, address affordability, and rebuild stronger and safer communities.

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