



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

# **O'Mara named to Environment/Agriculture/Housing and Economic Development joint budget conference committees ~ Meetings begin today, watch live**

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**Albany, N.Y., March 16**—State Senator Tom O’Mara (R,C,I- Big Flats) has been named by the Senate leadership to serve on the Legislature’s joint budget conference subcommittees on Environment/Agriculture/Housing, and Economic Development, as the next step in New York’s budget adoption process gets underway today at the Capitol.

The Legislature’s 10 individual, joint budget conference subcommittees will start holding public meetings today to begin settling Senate and Assembly differences over the 2016-17 New York State budget. The conference committee process more fully sets the table for final budget talks with Governor Andrew Cuomo.

Meetings of the Legislature’s budget conference subcommittees can be watched live on the following Senate website: <http://www.nysenate.gov/events>, as well as on O’Mara’s Senate website at <http://www.omara.nysenate.gov>. The Environment/Agriculture/Housing subcommittee is scheduled to meet at 1:30 p.m. in Hearing Room A of the Legislative Office Building ([watch here](#), and an archived video will be available on the same site following today's meeting). The Economic Development subcommittee will meet at 2:00 p.m. in Hearing Room A ([watch here](#), and an archived video will also be available on the same site following today's meeting).

Earlier this week each house of the Legislature [approved the changes they’d like to see made to Cuomo’s budget proposal](#).

“The Senate budget renews and revitalizes New York’s commitment to job growth, tax relief, infrastructure, agriculture, environmental conservation, and community development, health and safety,” said O’Mara. “The core proposals underpinning our fiscal strategy remain true to getting the middle class, farmers, small businesses and seniors out from under America’s highest tax burden, and creating an overall stronger state commitment, across the board, to encouraging and sustaining local economies and local private-sector job growth. I appreciate these committee assignments to try to ensure that many of our core proposals will be included in the final 2016-17 state budget.”

O’Mara, who chairs the Senate Environmental Conservation Committee, said that his conference committee assignments will afford the opportunity to have direct input into final budget negotiations that will impact the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions in positive ways in agriculture, conservation, economic development and tax relief.

He said, for example, that the Senate budget plan seeks \$300 million for the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF), a funding level that conservation groups and environmental advocates have strongly supported. The EPF provides funding for critical environmental initiatives including clean air and water projects. Studies have shown that for every dollar of EPF funds invested in land and water protection, the state and localities get back seven dollars in economic benefits. The Senate budget also includes an additional \$200 million for the “Water Quality Infrastructure Improvement Grant Program” to assist localities with undertaking drinking and wastewater infrastructure projects. Additionally, the Senate budget increases EPF funding to fight invasive species, including establishing a \$4-million matching grant fund for municipalities and lake owners’ associations to treat aquatic invasive species such as Eurasian Milfoil, as well as \$275 million for dredging projects.

The Senate is also pushing additional provisions of its “Grown in New York” agriculture development plan, which O’Mara co-sponsors, a comprehensive legislative program blending tax and regulatory reform incentives, low-interest loans and grants, an expanded student loan forgiveness program and other initiatives to help existing farmers stay on the land and encourage more young men and women to consider careers in agriculture.

O’Mara, a member of the Senate Agriculture Committee, said that it’s especially important that the Senate budget restores more than \$11 million in agricultural

program funding cuts proposed by Cuomo impacting nearly 50 different programs, the largest single reduction in agriculture programs in five years. Since 2011, O'Mara and his colleagues have initiated budget restorations and funding for new programs totaling more than \$32 million. Among other programs and institutions, the governor this year has proposed to cut or eliminate funding for the Wine and Grape Foundation, Future Farmers of America, Tractor Rollover Prevention, Farm Net (Farm Family Assistance), Integrated Pest Management, and the Cornell Diagnostic Lab along with other vital Cornell research and study programs invaluable to the dairy industry among other critical agricultural challenges including food safety research and study, disease detection and prevention, honeybee die-off, invasive species, pesticide use, and rabies prevention and treatment.

He added that the Senate budget includes \$200,000 for an innovative proposal by Cornell's Small Farms Program that the Senate proposed earlier this year to help establish up to five veteran-owned small farms through a first-in-the-nation pilot program. Returning veterans and those seeking a career change could be encouraged to try agriculture, utilizing benefits they've earned under the GI Bill to gain training and expertise to begin their own successful small business. In turn, these sites would be available to train additional veteran-farmers in future years.