



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Senator O'Mara's weekly column 'From the Capitol' ~ for the week of May 4, 2020 ~ 'Will there be a fair deal for Upstate?'

THOMAS F. O'MARA May 4, 2020

| ISSUE: **COVID-19**



Accountability, common sense, responsibility, and transparency in state government needs to rule the days, months, and years ahead. The immense outlay of state resources necessary for the COVID-19 response will demand to be tallied and made fully known. The decisions going forward on setting the priorities for rebuilding must be accomplished through a full public airing, and upstate is going to need strong voices in this decision-making process.

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 "From the Capitol..."

This week, "Will there be a fair deal for Upstate?"

May 4, 2020 -- "All things seem possible in May," a great American writer and naturalist once wrote.

Let's pray this month of May turns more hopeful here at home, throughout our state and nation, and around the world.

April was too tough a month for far too many.

We can and should be encouraged by steps underway to try to steadily bring more workers back on the job regionally, as well as more and more segments of our communities. And that means all types of businesses that can be operated reasonably safely, following the social distancing guidelines, not just "essential" businesses.

Always keep in mind: To get where we all want to go, we must keep heeding the guidance of our local public health departments -- departments, by the way, that earn our collective gratitude for the around-the-clock work they are doing to implement the public outreach they believe is best to keep all of us safe. What an effort, one that earns, as far as I'm concerned, an approach to re-opening that continues to hinge on personal responsibility.

Businesses and industries will do their part. So will local governments, law enforcement, first responders, hospitals, and other health care facilities. For everyone on the front lines, then, let's keep holding the line. Let's not risk throwing away all of the hard-earned perseverance and sacrifice. In my opinion, this means that even when we get more businesses open, people back to work, and activities going, that we continue to follow the safety protocols at work, to and from work, and at home. Getting back to work doesn't mean business as usual. There will no doubt be long-lasting impacts to our normal routines

The COVID-19 response remains paramount to getting our feet back under us and finding some solid ground again.

From strictly a state government perspective, some thoughts at this snapshot in time:

--New York State has been the hardest hit state in America. As a result, continued federal government dollars are absolutely fundamental to our statewide recovery, upstate and downstate. The New York State Association of Counties (NYSAC) estimated last week that counties alone face close to \$4 billion in lost revenues and aid;

--At the same time, accountability, common sense, responsibility, and transparency in state government needs to rule the days, months, and years ahead. The immense outlay of state resources necessary for the COVID-19 response will demand to be tallied and made fully known. The decisions going forward on setting the priorities for rebuilding must be accomplished through a full public airing, and upstate is going to need strong voices in this decision-making process.

Heading into the adoption of the 2020-2021 state budget, I hoped that state leaders would enact a straightforward, streamlined budget focused on the coronavirus response and meeting New York's short-term obligations and responsibilities. Then, I believed, 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 that open and full discussion on the best way to move forward for this entire state, upstate and downstate.

That, in my view, would have been common sense. It would have been fair. It didn't happen. The new budget, particularly for upstate New York and the regions I represent, is a fiscal plan containing too much business as usual, questionable spending and borrowing, and a non-budget-related pursuit of a so-called "progressive" political agenda that unfairly produces additional fiscal and economic burdens and uncertainties for future generations in this region, even long after the COVID-19 response mission is complete.

This way of doing state government's business needs to become a practice of the past. Moving forward, I am extremely concerned that, in a state government under one-party, downstate Democrat control, Upstate New York communities, economies, governments, schools, taxpayers, and workers will not get a fair deal or even a fair shake. We have not been getting it in the recent past and the examples are many.

But the day will come for refocusing on all of that.

Right now, the priority remains: Keep getting this public health crisis under control. Keep taking smart steps to find solid ground.

Keep doing our part.