



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Senator O'Mara's weekly column 'From the Capitol' ~ for the week of May 18, 2020 ~ 'An important step on a long road back'

THOMAS F. O'MARA May 18, 2020

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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 "From the Capitol..."

This week, "An important step on a long road back"

Finally.

The start of the Phase I reopening across the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions is an important mile marker on this long road back to public health and economic renewal.

It's just a first step, but it sure feels like a big one.

First and foremost, make no mistake that reaching this point of reopening is the product of personal responsibility, and enormous perseverance and sacrifice. Every single one of us who heard the public health guidelines, and then honored them, made the difference. This public health emergency called for all hands on deck and you responded. Don't throw it away now. Keep holding the line and listening to our local public health departments. We cannot risk setbacks.

Public health has been and remains the top priority because it is paramount to being able to fully attack the economic crisis that has inflicted enormous pain and upheaval.

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

On the economic front of this battle to reclaim and regain solid ground in our lives, we will need the Cuomo administration to better recognize that our regional reopening can 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. The guidelines that are absolutely necessary in downstate regions shouldn't be unreasonably applied upstate.

Prior to the start of reopening last week, Steuben County Legislative Chairman Scott VanEtten questioned pieces of the Phase I process.

"We must comply with Gov. Andrew Cuomo's executive orders and resulting regulations – and they can change from day to day and even hour to hour. It's nuts," he said.

He's right and I've had this discussion with many local leaders and citizens. We will continue pushing the state to recognize specific regional concerns and suggestions – and the need for sensible compromises and effective, safe resolutions.

This reopening is a badly needed first step and a long-awaited break in the storm clouds.

Now begins the hard part. There is so much work facing us to fix what's broken and keep providing fundamental assistance. Last week, a virtual, joint Senate-Assembly hearing collected input from the New York Farm Bureau, National Federation of Independent Businesses of New York, Unshackle Upstate, the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Cornell University and numerous other voices of small business, farming, tourism, manufacturing and other foundations of local economies.

Coming out of this COVID-19 response and the shutdown, these ongoing discussions, on a bipartisan basis, become increasingly critical. The same goes for fixing New York State's desperately broken unemployment insurance system and conducting an independent investigation of the COVID-19 tragedy in nursing homes.

Since the beginning of the state shutdown in mid-March, a "One-Stop" webpage on omara.nysenate.gov has provided, in one place, access to a wide range of information and resources from across the spectrum of federal, state, and local agencies and organizations. This page will remain available throughout the COVID-19 response and reopening process as new guidelines, recommendations, and updates are continually issued.

Pay attention to them. As I have said repeatedly throughout these long months, one way we stay together is by staying informed.