



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Senator O'Mara's weekly column ~ for the week of October 5, 2020 ~ 'At home, we have built models of effective government'

THOMAS F. O'MARA October 5, 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...

This week, "At home, we have built models of effective government"

Last week in this column, I highlighted what has been and will continue to be -- maybe more than ever before -- a foundation of future success: Regional teamwork, at every level.

It bears repeating. Being involved in government and community life in the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions throughout my lifetime, I have always been struck by this fact: When our backs are against the wall around here, like now, regional representatives and citizens pull together.

That's important.

Division, gridlock, petty politics, personal attacks – approaches that get in the way of effective government in too many other places – do NOT define the nuts-and-bolts of government for our region.

More often than not, we turn to a long tradition of pulling together to get the job done.

It's at the core of my service whenever we have faced natural disasters, economic downturns, or so many other challenges, including our current public health crisis when government offices, including mine, have become command centers to assist constituents and communities obtain assistance, access information, and in so many other ways.

It is a way of service that I believe has stood the test of time.

Fortunately, we've had our fair share of successes.

Take, for example, the admirable local network of shared services we have built over the past decade across this region and that deliver, year after year, incredible benefits to municipalities and local property taxpayers.

It's work that may not always get the attention it deserves, however on the ground throughout Chemung, Schuyler, Steuben, Yates and Tompkins counties, year after year, difference-making work is being accomplished effectively and cost efficiently.

My legislative colleagues and I locally have worked closely and diligently to help strengthen and support this commitment to shared services through funding and other initiatives. It is a wise use of taxpayer dollars. It makes a difference for local property taxpayers, the quality of local communities, and the sustainability of local economies and environments.

Collectively, in my view, it constitutes exactly what's meant by good government.

For instance, under the outstanding direction of the Chemung, Schuyler and Steuben soil and water conservation districts, we benefit from one of the most proactive stream and infrastructure protection programs anywhere in New York State.

Working together, these men and women do remarkable work helping local municipalities, residents, farmers and others achieve critical environmental protection and infrastructure improvement projects in the most cost-effective way possible.

This valuable local shared-services partnership helps protect local environments, local waterways, and local infrastructure across the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions, and it helps save local property taxpayers millions of dollars.

I'm proud to hold it up as a stellar model of cooperation and cost savings, one that could be of benefit throughout New York State. I have made it a personal priority in state government to diligently support it in many ways.

Through our commitment to shared services, hundreds of projects are achieved annually, including responding and recovering more rapidly and effectively in the aftermath of severe storms and flooding. In addition to storm mitigation, the shared-services partnership helps accomplish stream stabilization, culvert upsizing, retention ponds, combating nonpoint source pollution and soil erosion, and numerous other infrastructure protection projects throughout the region.

The districts also undertake critical efforts to limit Harmful Algae Blooms (HABs) in regional lakes and streams, and to protect clean water.

According to Schuyler County Soil and Water Conservation District Manager Jerry Verrigni, "These projects have helped save tens of thousands of tons of sediment and tens of thousands of pounds of nutrients, focusing on nitrogen and phosphorus to protect and improve our water quality for both recreation and drinking water sources. These projects protect and improve millions of dollars of public and private infrastructure, as well provide for the protection and improvement of fish habitat and water quality of our pristine natural resources which makes our region a leader in tourism in New York."

We tip our caps to Jerry and his colleagues across this region including Chemung SWCD Manager Mark Watts, Steuben SWCD Manager Jeff Parker, Yates County SWCD Manager Colby Petersen, and Tompkins County SWCD Manager Jonathan Negley.

We can't stress enough the importance of building and growing these partnerships.

This idea of government – and our commitment to it – will be critical to our success in the months and years ahead which, let's be honest, could be as tough as any we have ever faced.

Now is no time to turn our backs on it.