



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Senator O'Mara's weekly column 'From the Capitol' ~ for the week of November 2, 2020 ~ 'Defining our region for the better'

THOMAS F. O'MARA November 2, 2020

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Over all this time, while the region weathered natural disasters, economic downturns, community crises and more, this fact stays true: When our backs are against the wall, regional representatives, at every level, more often than not turn to a long and important tradition of working together to get the job done. It is a tradition of service that has served us well. I am proud we do our best to carry it on. Believe me, we are fortunate to have this foundation for cooperation in place to confront the enormous, enormous challenges ahead.

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, "Defining our region for the better"

Years from now, looking back, our children will recall 2020 as the year of COVID-19.

These past months have turned lives upside down and their memories will cover a lot of ground.

Still, here's my hope: I hope that one of their foremost recollections will be how communities and families pulled together. It's been a strong reminder, for me, of the best of what we do here in the Finger Lakes and Southern Tier regions.

I grew up and began my career in public service here. My wife and I raised three children in Chemung County.

Over all this time, while the region weathered natural disasters, economic downturns, community crises and more, this fact stays true: When our backs are against the wall, regional representatives, at every level, more often than not turn to a long and important tradition of working together to get the job done.

Set aside political party, ideology or anything that too often, in too many other places, stands in the way of effective government. Division, infighting, personal attacks or petty politics are not what has defined the nuts-and-bolts delivery of government in our region.

It is a tradition of service that has served us well. I am proud we do our best to carry it on. Believe me, we are fortunate to have this foundation for cooperation in place to confront the enormous, enormous challenges ahead.

Now is no time to turn our backs on this vital sense of governing. It has defined our region for the better for so long. We should be proud of it, and I believe we are.

I am eager to continue helping this region recover and rebuild – from Watkins Glen to Hornell to Corning to Penn Yan to Elmira to Ithaca, and back again, all across one of New York's geographically largest Senate Districts.

Since the outset of COVID-19, legislative offices have become command centers of assistance and outreach. The groundwork of cooperation put down over many years allowed us to quickly respond with local government, local law enforcement, local public health departments, local food banks, local educators, local libraries – an overall army of local first responders too many to entirely acknowledge here – to quickly marshal resources and engage a collaborative public response in unforeseen and unprecedented ways for the sake of workers, families, the elderly and other vulnerable populations, communities, and economic sectors.

It's working because it has always worked for us, and we will see it through to the end.

We join together to set goals, identify and solve problems, and work cooperatively to achieve important projects on priorities like strengthening our police and fire departments, enhancing public safety and security, boosting job creation and economic development, improving local roads and bridges, developing water quality infrastructure, protecting local waterways and other environments, revitalizing downtowns and Main Streets, combating invasive species and HABs, and so much more – and to do it in ways that try to ease the burden on local property taxpayers.

That's what we've done before and in the months and years ahead – months and years which will be as challenging as any we have ever faced – this is what we will do again.

It takes collaboration, it takes steadfast commitment, it takes proven know-how, and it takes the kind of trust that can only be cemented over time and shared experience.

There's plenty I'm proud of having helped achieve as a public official, but right at this moment, with the year we've faced and are facing, nothing makes me prouder than this: We have worked together, day after day, night after night, to stay informed, persevere and, somehow, keep pushing forward.

I hope it has provided a memorable example for our young people and for the future of our communities.