



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Senator O'Mara's weekly column 'From the Capitol' ~ for the week of January 25, 2021 ~ 'Budget adoption process kicks into virtual high gear this week'

THOMAS F. O'MARA January 25, 2021

| ISSUE: **NEW YORK STATE BUDGET**



It's shaping up as one of the most consequential state budgets New York has ever faced.

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, **"Budget adoption process kicks into virtual high gear this week"**

The 2021-2022 state budget adoption process marks my first as the Ranking Member on the Senate Finance Committee.

It's shaping up as one of the most consequential state budgets New York has ever faced.

After a year when the COVID-19 pandemic has turned everything upside down, the choices made and the direction charted in this new budget could be transformational for the future of local communities, economies and taxpayers.

In my view, here's the fundamental question: Will it be transformational in some long-overdue, positive sense, or will it end up compounding the crises that have long stood in the way of a true turnaround in this state?

The Legislature's fiscal committees -- Senate Finance, and Assembly Ways and Means -- once again take the lead this year in examining Governor Cuomo's just-released budget plan. Beginning this week and continuing through February 23, committee members will hear testimony from state agency heads, local leaders, public interest groups, and other organizations and advocates to get a stronger sense, in detail, of how the executive's proposed strategy would impact specific programs, services, communities, employers, not-for-profit service providers, economies, taxpayers and much more.

What we hear and what we learn over the course of these 13 public hearings sets the stage for final negotiations on a new state budget.

Last week, after legislators first received Governor Cuomo's roughly \$193-billion spending plan, my first reaction was a warning – a warning that the governor is charting a course for New York that could leave a future generation of state and local taxpayers holding a hefty bill for a questionable agenda of overspending.

For starters, to achieve his hoped-for budget this year Governor Cuomo counts on New York receiving \$15 billion in federal funding in the next COVID-19 stimulus package. In what can only be called one of the most bizarre moves ever by any New York State governor, Governor Cuomo plans to sue the federal government if he doesn't get it.

Nevertheless, if New York does receive a \$15-billion federal bailout, this governor intends to just go ahead and spend it. Keep in mind that any federal funding will be a one-time, non-recurring infusion of cash. It will be here and gone back out the door as quick as the governor can sign the spending authorizations. Make no mistake, however, the spending done now on grand new programs or big new projects (mainly downstate-oriented in the governor's plan, by the way) will

incur costs that will remain as the responsibility of taxpayers long after this governor has left the scene.

We are staring at another year of ignoring the fiscal warning signs and throwing caution to the wind at the worst possible time, instead of re-setting the unsustainable direction New York State keeps heading.

Under Governor Cuomo's plan as it stands, future New Yorkers could be left footing an outrageous bill for this governor's and this Legislature's overspending and overtaxing.

That's my starting point.

Details on the governor's budget proposal are available on the state Division of the Budget (DOB) website, www.budget.ny.gov.

The Legislature's fiscal hearings start this week with specific examinations of the governor's proposed plans for transportation, environmental conservation, elementary education and housing.

The schedule of virtual hearings and live streams can be found at: <https://www.nysenate.gov/events> (video archives of all the hearings will also be located here).

The hearings can also be viewed on the Legislative Cable Channel on most local cable systems (view the statewide channel listing here: <https://www.nysenate.gov/about-legislative-cable-channel>).

As I stated at the start, this year's legislative hearings are crucial. The next state budget could have a transformational impact on most of the key issues facing us.

In my new role as the top Republican member on the Finance Committee – where we face an uphill fight as a minority party in a state government firmly under one-party control at the moment – I'm hopeful to continue being a voice for lower taxes, less regulation, greater accountability, economic growth, job creation, and more common sense on state fiscal practices.

###