



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

## Senator O'Mara's weekly column 'From the Capitol' ~ for the week of March 1, 2020 ~ 'Local Roads Are Essential'

THOMAS F. O'MARA March 1, 2021



We have always stood together with New York's county and town highway superintendents, and local leaders, and we intend to keep doing everything we can to rally legislative support. Local roads are essential. State investment in local roads and bridges is critical to the future of our local communities, economies, environments, governments and taxpayers.

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, "Local roads are essential"

Many New Yorkers are aware that the State Capitol is embroiled in controversy while the Cuomo administration remains embattled by calls for investigations over, among other matters, its handling of the COVID-19 response in nursing homes and long-term care facilities, sexual harassment, and threatening legislators and reporters.

It is clear by now that Governor Cuomo is in full damage control mode on the nursing homes cover-up. Someone's not telling the truth and all of the indicator lights point to the Cuomo inner circle. The only way now to determine the facts is through a team of independent investigators that will subpoena all of the emails, phone calls and other records, and then compel testimony from across the administration. The governor, state Health Commissioner Howard Zucker, and their inner circle have a story, they're sticking to it, and they want their version of this tragedy to be the final word. Their story is that they did everything right and wouldn't change a thing -- that is, to even send in excess of 9,000 COVID-positive hospital patients into nursing homes again!

That will not be the final word.

Still, we are turning the calendar to March and the business of adopting a new state budget kicks into high gear. Legislative hearings on the governor's proposed budget concluded last week and, soon, joint Senate-Assembly budget conference committees will start working.

One other thing that stands out at the Capitol this year is that the usual crush of advocates in the hallways visiting lawmakers' offices is not part of this year's process because of the pandemic. In other words, it's quiet in the hallways of the Capitol and the Legislative Office Building.

That's not to say that advocates aren't making themselves heard. They are and that's important.

One group in particular has been a top priority of mine, along with regional Assemblyman Phil Palmesano, throughout the past decade. The COVID-19 pandemic may prevent hundreds of local highway superintendents and highway department employees, from every corner of New York, from lobbying in Albany like they always do this week. Nevertheless, the group is still pushing ahead with its annual advocacy effort, renamed this year as the "Local Roads Are Essential" campaign.

It's all about greater state investment in local transportation infrastructure.

Assemblyman Palmesano and I have once again organized a legislative coalition to get behind the effort. We have always stood together with New York's county and town highway superintendents, and local leaders, and we intend to keep doing everything we can to rally legislative support. Local

roads are essential. State investment in local roads and bridges is critical to the future of our local communities, economies, environments, governments and taxpayers.

Over the past eight years, largely through a series of “Extreme Winter Recovery” allocations distributed through the state’s Consolidated Local Street and Highway Improvement Program (CHIPS) funding formula, and together with the PAVE-NY and BRIDGE-NY programs established in 2016, important and significant increased state support has been provided for New York’s counties, cities, towns and villages.

Governor Cuomo, in his proposed 2021-2022 state budget, has called for “expanding our infrastructure plan to invest \$306 billion in the future of New York. That's not just the largest infrastructure plan in New York history. It's the largest, most ambitious plan put forward by any state in the nation.”

We welcome the governor’s ambitious call, but we want to make sure local roads and bridges are at the top of his infrastructure’s to-do list.

Unfortunately, in his proposed budget, Governor Cuomo holds base level funding for CHIPS flat at \$438 million for the ninth straight year and outright eliminates funding for Extreme Winter Recovery, a \$65 million cut.

To put forth, in the governor’s words, the “largest infrastructure plan in New York history” and fundamentally ignore local roads and bridges is ridiculous. It completely disregards one of the most pressing and neglected needs for Empire State infrastructure.

If Governor Cuomo is as truly committed as he says he is to “the largest, most ambitious plan” in the nation, it cannot be just about big, flashy, legacy-building projects, mostly concentrated in the New York City, downstate region.

The fact is that nothing will do more to help move New York State forward in the post-pandemic era than beginning to truly transform and revitalize the state-local partnership through investment in local infrastructure.

Therefore, we’ve got our work cut out for us beginning this week. We will be calling on Governor Cuomo and legislative leaders to finally face the tremendous, still unmet needs confronting the effective maintenance and improvement of local roads and bridges.

We will be doing our best to make it clear: Local roads are essential.

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