



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Senator O'Mara's weekly column 'From the Capitol' ~ for the week of April 12, 2021 ~ 'New budget of missed opportunities and a troubling future'

THOMAS F. O'MARA April 12, 2021

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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, **“New budget of missed opportunities and a troubling future”**

In the weeks leading up to the adoption of the new, 2021-2022 state budget, I kept repeating that we had an opportunity and a responsibility to utilize a massive, one-time flood of federal stimulus aid, nearly \$13 billion, in a fiscally responsible way.

We faced an unprecedented chance to commit New York State to a short- and long-term strategy for the post-COVID rebuilding, restoring, and resetting of local communities, economies, environments, and governments for the long term.

Equally important, we were presented with the possibility to recognize the fiscal challenges New York will face for the foreseeable future, steer clear of any massive new taxing and spending, and bolster the state’s emergency reserve funds.

Those were the opportunities we faced, and we missed every one of them.

Instead, the Albany Democratic supermajorities in the Legislature took full advantage of having scandal-plagued Governor Cuomo over a barrel and have set us up for an economic and fiscal disaster.

It is incredible how far New York State has fallen since Governor Cuomo delivered his inaugural State of the State address in 2011.

“The State of New York spends too much money,” Governor Cuomo said at the start of his administration. “It is that blunt and simple.”

A decade later, with a Cuomo administration embroiled in controversy and weakened, this year’s state budget hikes state government spending by a whopping \$18 billion and in a way that could bring New York State and our schools to the edge of the fiscal cliff in the not-too-distant future. Remember the Gap Elimination Adjustment (GEA) from 2010? The one that resulted in our school districts losing out on more than \$8 billion the last time the Democrats had full control of the Legislature?

Here's one other thing Governor Cuomo proclaimed in 2011: "We have to hold the line on taxes for now and reduce taxes in the future. New York has no future as the tax capital of the nation. Our young people will not stay. Our business will not come. This has to change."

Fast forward to 2021 and what's changed is that Governor Cuomo has enacted a new state budget increasing taxes by more than \$4 billion, planting New Yorkers firmly in the highest-taxed state in America.

Simply put, in my view, New York's new \$212-billion fiscal plan increases state spending by over eight percent and sets in motion a whole host of future, long-term commitments to massive new spending and taxing. It's irresponsible.

Clearly there are pieces of the budget that we all can point to as good things that we've wanted -- in some cases even commendable. How could that not be the case with \$18 billion in increased spending? At its core, however, this budget demonstrates the threat that lies ahead with a state government under one-party, so-called progressive control. The undercurrent of far-left progressivism has always existed in this Legislature but it was long kept in check by a Republican-controlled Senate and, for a time, a governor who was at least willing to talk the importance of restraint.

No more.

With Governor Cuomo desperately trying to save his political skin, he now willingly joins the legislative Democrat supermajorities to enact an outrageous tax-and-spend plan. It will force future generations of taxpayers to foot an enormous bill because the Socialist-leaning, far-left, extremely liberal, largely New York City-based wing of the Democratic party is in control of the agenda and scoring victory after victory on a Socialist wish list heading toward a fiscal and economic train wreck.

This budget sets New York loose on an irresponsible, radical, out-of-control course. It blows through a one-time federal windfall and then hopes to pay for a future of unsustainable spending with higher and higher taxes. They will claim that they are only soaking the rich to pay for it but make no mistake: Sooner or later, every taxpayer, across the board, will pay the price and foot the bill.

This new Albany Democrat vision for New York sets a troubling standard of recklessness. Take, for example, a \$2.1-billion, taxpayer-financed fund to deliver lump-sum payments to undocumented immigrants who were excluded from receiving federal stimulus checks or unemployment benefits since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. The new fund, being called the "Excluded Workers

Fund,” could deliver one-time, lump-sum state payments of up to \$15,600 to some recipients. It’s the latest example of just how out of touch it’s becoming. You read that right, New York Democrats have raised taxes on New Yorkers by \$4 billion and are giving \$2.1 billion of that to illegal immigrants. And we thought giving them drivers’ licenses was too much.

It also points to where we’re headed.

“Welcome to the latest episode of progressives gone wild,” the Wall Street Journal editorialized, “All of this demonstrates the end of Mr. Cuomo’s utility as a check on the progressive left. Now that Mr. Cuomo is politically weak...he is an open door for progressives. New York will pay the price.”

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