



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR
Thomas F. O'Mara

Senator O'Mara's weekly column 'From the Capitol' ~ for the week of May 3, 2021 ~ 'An alarm sounding louder than ever'

THOMAS F. O'MARA May 3, 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, "An alarm sounding louder than ever"

Here we go again.

The ink on the new state budget is barely dry and the Albany Democrats are already eyeing their next tax hike opportunities

That's right. New York's out-of-control Democrat supermajorities just enacted a \$212-billion state budget that blew through a one-time \$13-billion windfall of federal aid, increased state government spending by \$18 billion, and raised taxes by nearly five billion dollars.

Already, it's not enough for them.

Already, it's being made clear that we're in for an unending search for more tax dollars to afford more spending and every taxpayer will pay the price.

Their latest target includes a newly proposed 55-cents-per-gallon hike in the state tax on gasoline to help generate revenue to implement a radical, unsustainable, impractical climate change agenda. Specifically, the legislation (S4264/A6967), known as the "Climate and Community Investment Act," calls for accelerated state-level actions to achieve broad and far-reaching climate change policies. It includes the 55-cents-per-gallon increase in the gas tax as well as increased taxes on heating oil, propane, and natural gas, which is estimated to increase home heating fuel costs by 26%.

In short, the legislation would implement regressive taxes that would leave lower- and middle-income families and workers, motorists, truckers, farmers, manufacturers and other industries, and seniors among the hardest hit. Especially across Upstate New York.

According to the Tax Foundation, New York currently has the 7th highest gas tax in the country, at 43.12 centers per gallon with California currently the highest at 62.47 cents per gallon. This legislation would raise New York's tax to 98.12 cents per gallon, an increase of more than 127 percent, and would make New York's gas tax more than 57 percent higher than any other state.

New York's business tax climate has long been noted by the Tax Foundation as one of the nation's worst.

Greg Biryla, Senior State Director of the National Federation of Independent Business of New York (NFIB of NY), recently said, "COVID-19 continues to present unimaginable and unprecedented challenges for New York's local businesses and job creators...Albany should be concentrating all its efforts on identifying policies and solutions to support and sustain those small businesses still hanging on rather than imposing new burdens or exploring new ways to increase costs. Significantly higher taxes on gasoline, transportation, and heating fuel is the wrong idea at the worst possible time."

The just-released Census numbers made it clear, once again, that the exodus from New York remains well underway and because of it, we will, among other negative consequences, lose one Congressional seat next year.

Different pundits can hem and haw about why -- and they are -- but clearly the most significant fact it's underway is because of New York State government policies.

Governor Andrew Cuomo and the Legislature's Democratic supermajorities may well have state government under lock and key at the moment. They can boast all they want about how the voters have spoken and willingly, according to them, chosen to live under one-party, largely downstate Democratic control.

Many New Yorkers, however, continue to vote with their feet. They are leaving New York because of our high cost of living, high taxes, out-of-control spending, oppressive business tax climate, and, especially now, because they see a scandal-scarred state government in full pursuit of an out-of-touch, pie-in-the-sky, unsustainable, dangerous, and disastrous so-called progressive agenda.

Earlier this year, the well-respected Upstate advocacy organization, Upstate United (previously known as Unshackle Upstate), once again sounded the alarm on the tax burden.

Upstate United Executive Director Justin Wilcox said, "As special interests keep calling on Albany to raise taxes, our organization is committed to fighting for much-needed tax relief. Overburdened taxpayers continue to flee New York due, in part, to the state's extraordinary tax burden. Returning to the days of massive tax hikes and bloated budgets isn't progressive, it's problematic."

It's an alarm sounding louder than ever.

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