



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Senator O'Mara's weekly column 'From the Capitol' ~ for the week of May 17, 2021 ~ 'Protect those who protect us'

THOMAS F. O'MARA May 17, 2021

| ISSUE: **LAW ENFORCEMENT APPRECIATION; PUBLIC SAFETY**



We cannot sit back and simply accept and tolerate the ongoing attacks on the men and women in law enforcement serving to protect our communities and neighborhoods. They risk their lives around the clock, every day and every night, in an increasingly hostile environment, to keep us safe from violent criminals who have no respect whatsoever for the law or for other lives.

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, "Protect those who protect us"

Over the past three years, the home security consumer awareness and research organization Safewise conducted a “The State of Safety in America” nationwide survey of “more than 15,000 Americans to see how safe they feel.”

According to the group’s final report, issued in March, “New York is by far the most concerned state.” New York is the “most worried about safety” state in the nation, the survey found, with 70 percent of New Yorkers reporting that they are “concerned daily” about their safety. Additionally, only 40 percent of New Yorkers feel safe in their everyday lives, while 78 percent think crime is increasing. You can view the full report here: www.safewise.com/state-of-safety.

In the terrible aftermath of the George Floyd tragedy last May, I wrote, “There can be no place anywhere, in any of our institutions, for racial discrimination, injustice, abuse of authority, or violence...and there is not a place for the intolerable anarchy, rioting, looting, destruction, and anti-police rhetoric and violence.”

Unfortunately, we have seen a troubling and extremely dangerous escalation of anti-police rhetoric and violence throughout this state, upstate and downstate -- from the hotbed of New York City to Syracuse, Rochester and Buffalo, and many places in between. In short, this heightened anti-police activity and the continued impact of disastrous pro-criminal public policies like the “No Bail” reform law that took effect earlier this year, ongoing parole reform, and other actions have exacerbated unrest.

It threatens the men and women in blue everywhere. Many of them tell us that there has never been a more difficult or dangerous time to serve.

Last summer, county sheriffs from throughout the Southern Tier and statewide sounded the alarm over this heightened violence and ongoing, unworkable public policies that go against law enforcement.

I agree with their deep concern. In response, I stood together with many Senate colleagues and law enforcement officers to endorse a package of legislation known as the “Protect Those Who Protect Us Act.” It is aimed at deterring violence against law enforcement by strengthening penalties for existing crimes and establishing new crimes to prevent attacks on police officers.

Our Senate Republican Conference attempted to move the legislation to a vote on the floor of the Senate last year, but our effort was rejected by the Senate Democrat Majority.

Last week, we renewed this call for action. Among other provisions, we seek the approval of legislation to:

- > strengthen criminal penalties for assaulting a police officer and make them crimes for which a judge could require the posting of bail;**
- > withhold state funding from any municipality that abolishes, disbands, or significantly reduces its police department;**
- > create new crimes for harassing police and peace officers by striking them with any substance or objects including bottles, rocks, bodily fluids, flammable liquids or other hazardous or dangerous substances;**
- > make any crime committed against a police officer because of his or her status as a police officer a hate crime;**
- > establish a crime for doxxing (publishing private or identifying information on the Internet, i.e. addresses, phone numbers, etc.) of a police officer or peace officer because of the officer's status as an officer;**
- > establish a crime for falsely accusing a police or peace officer of wrongdoing in the performance of his or her duties; and**
- > make Police Memorial Day on May 15 a state holiday in honor of the more than 1,500 police officers who have died in the line of duty in New York.**

We cannot sit back and simply accept and tolerate the ongoing attacks on the men and women in law enforcement serving to protect our communities and neighborhoods. They risk their lives around the clock, every day and every night, in an increasingly hostile environment, to keep us safe from violent criminals who have no respect whatsoever for the law or for other lives.

Anyone who would simply shrug and say it's not happening here, or that it can't happen there, isn't paying attention. It can happen anywhere else in this state or nation. Furthermore, violence against a police officer anywhere is an attack on police officers everywhere.

We have to take steps to let our police officers, peace officers, corrections officers, all officers of the law, across the board, know that we stand with them and that we have their backs, as well as to ensure that we are doing everything possible to prevent a complete breakdown of our society.

The National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial in Washington D.C. was dedicated in 1991, during the presidency of then-President George H.W. Bush. The spirit of America's monument to law enforcement officers who have fallen in the line of duty is captured by the words of then-President Bush, words that still ring true at this very moment, "Carved on these walls is the story of America, of a continuing quest to preserve both democracy and decency, and to protect a national treasure that we call the American dream."

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