



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Senator O'Mara's weekly column 'From the Capitol' ~ for the week of June 21, 2021 ~ 'State government cannot be left to Cuomo legacy building'

THOMAS F. O'MARA June 21, 2021

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Governor Cuomo's pandemic emergency powers remaining in place at this moment benefit the governor and the governor alone. That's not what state government needs to be about during the critical days and months ahead of reassessing, rebuilding, resetting, and restoring.

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, "State government cannot be left to Cuomo legacy building"

Late last week, after New York State reached a 70% vaccination rate statewide, Governor Cuomo ran with that benchmark as a reason to celebrate – fireworks included.

He didn't declare the end of the state of emergency, keep in mind, or the executive emergency powers that he still holds. The governor just saw fit to gather a group of cheering supporters at the World Trade Center in Manhattan to kick off a daylong, campaign-style celebration of...Governor Cuomo and his administration's charade of leading us through the dark days of COVID-19.

There's reason to cheer (because it's been a long year) the apparent end of most COVID-related restrictions across New York State. Most restrictions have been lifted, for now, but not all. Under one still-in-place Cuomo edict, for example, children in school are still required to wear masks, a mandate that many of us believe no longer makes any rational, reasonable or scientific sense for the health and well-being of our children. Other restrictions remain in effect and the governor warned about keeping watch on future flare-ups of variants and the like.

In other words, the governor was eager to celebrate and tout a worthy milestone, however he made it clear that his COVID-19 emergency powers – through which over the past 15 months he has issued nearly 100 Executive Orders that have allowed him to unilaterally change hundreds of state laws, as well as implement rules and regulations, and make spending decisions, without legislative approval -- are alive and well, and he will therefore continue to exercise control as he sees fit.

What about that?

First, let's focus on what we all have been waiting, working, and sacrificing toward. It has been clear throughout the past fifteen months, and it bears repeating, that communities here in the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions, and across New York State, could not have kept moving forward since the onset of the pandemic emergency last March without the compassion, perseverance, sacrifice, and undeniable strength of frontline workers, essential employees and volunteers in health care, agriculture, businesses large and small, law enforcement and public safety, education, community and social services, and so many other fields.

Our gratitude to our frontline heroes cannot be measured and, in my view, their example will continue to show the way to a better and stronger future. We have demonstrated that by working

together, pulling for each other, and staying informed, our communities will always be resilient and, in the face of whatever comes our way, never lose hope in recovering.

That will be the case here. The work of rebuilding and getting our communities back on solid ground again should begin in earnest now. Most importantly, it needs to be delivered through local decision-making.

Governor Cuomo wouldn't say it last week – and he's not about to relinquish it on his own -- but we have reached the point of being able to fully declare an end to the state of emergency that has ruled our lives since last March. We have reached the point of fully rescinding Governor Cuomo's unilateral emergency powers.

It is time to restore legislative checks and balances, and local input. Many of the governor's actions have now gone well beyond the necessary scope of the COVID-19 emergency response to the unwarranted infringement of individual liberties and the detriment of the fundamental fabric of local communities and economies.

Governor Cuomo's pandemic emergency powers remaining in place at this moment benefit the governor and the governor alone. That's not what state government needs to be about during the critical days and months ahead of reassessing, rebuilding, resetting, and restoring.

Moving forward in New York State cannot be left to the risk of Governor Cuomo continuing to abuse the powers of his office and state resources for his ongoing political survival and legacy building.

The multiple investigations and scandals surrounding the Cuomo administration -- and the tragic shortcomings of one-man rule throughout this pandemic -- have already done more than enough to darken the skies over New York State in many ways.

No amount of fireworks can ever change that reality for far too many New Yorkers.

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