



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Senator O'Mara's weekly column 'From the Capitol' ~ for the week of December 13, 2021 ~ 'Watch your wallet heading into a new year in NYS government'

THOMAS F. O'MARA December 14, 2021

| ISSUE: **STATE SPENDING**



In 2018, the year before the Democrats took control of state government, the state budget stood at \$164 billion. The 2021-22 state budget cashes in at an unprecedented \$212 billion.

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, "Watch your wallet heading into a new year in NYS government"

Following the November 2018 elections, when New York State government fell under total, one-party, Democrat control, then-Governor Andrew Cuomo exclaimed that he felt “liberated” without a state Senate Republican Majority left standing in his way.

The former governor’s feeling was no doubt shared by the longstanding Assembly Democrat majority and, of course, the newly crowned Senate Democrat leadership.

And, indeed, liberated they have been, especially when it comes to spending taxpayer dollars.

Following the enactment of that first all-Democrat state budget in 2019-2020, the state comptroller reported that state spending increased by nearly three times the inflation rate. According to an analysis from the Empire Center for Public Policy (empirecenter.org) – an analysis, by the way, which relied on the comptroller’s update on the state’s short- and long-term financial picture – the 2019-20 budget hiked spending by nearly 6 percent, projected a \$14 billion debt increase over five years, and was “balanced by an accounting gimmick.”

Fast forward to the 2021-2022 state budget enacted in April, negotiated at a time when the Democrat supermajorities in the Legislature had Cuomo over a barrel due to his evolving sex harassment and nursing home cover-up investigations. Cuomo tried to curry favor from the Democrats with your tax dollars with giveaways that increased spending by a whopping \$18 billion, over 8%, and on top of the spending, hiked state taxes by nearly \$5 billion.

As the ranking member on the Senate Finance Committee, I said at the time this year’s budget was approved that, yes, this budget addresses a number of important priorities and programs. How could it not with \$18 billion in new spending? However, overall, this Albany Democrat giveaway went far beyond any reasonable sense of fairness, responsibility, or sustainability for hard-working, taxpaying citizens.

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That’s the alarm many of us keep hearing as we approach a new legislative session in 2022: What’s next?

In short, the hard-left direction of

New York State politics and government does not look pretty, at the moment, for future generations of state and local taxpayers.

Just as the Legislature had former Governor Cuomo over a barrel in 2021, this coming year they will have a situation in which new Governor Kathy Hochul is submitting her first budget as she tries to curry favor with the Democrats for her upcoming Democrat primary election in June to continue as governor. Your tax dollars could yet again be used for political gain.

Consider just a small sampling of what the Albany Democrats' newfound power to spend taxpayer dollars has produced since 2019:

> the "DREAM Act" to provide taxpayer-funded college tuition assistance to illegal immigrant families;

> significantly increased spending on Medicaid.

New York spends more on Medicaid than the more populous states of Florida and Texas combined. According to a new Empire Center analysis, "Medicaid's Metamorphosis," one in three New Yorkers is now covered by Medicaid, which was originally "designed as a 'safety net' health plan for the poor and disabled." Furthermore, according to the report, "people living above the federal poverty line accounted for all of the program's growth" during the decade between 2010 and 2019;

> using taxpayers dollars to finance political campaigns, commonly known as public campaign financing, at a cost projected to be in excess of \$200 million of taxpayer dollars each election cycle; and

> remember that the 2021-22 state budget also included a \$2-billion-plus "Excluded Workers Fund" to provide direct, one-time payments of up to \$15,600 to illegal immigrants in New York State who were excluded from federal COVID stimulus and unemployment payments. Yes, the Albany Democrats raised taxes to give handouts to illegal immigrants. That initial fund of billions of dollars was already depleted by October and many Democrat lawmakers are now clamoring for more of your money to give them.

Even with all this new spending, the newfound unilateral Democrat control of state government has not reduced or eliminated unfunded state mandates on local governments and schools, which would provide much needed property tax relief.

So you better believe it's always going to be the key question as this state tries to move forward under one-party control: What's next? A state-level, universal health care system that many believe will simply break the bank? A new 55-cents-per-gallon gas tax that would leave New Yorkers paying the highest gas tax in America? A 26% increase on home heating fuels?

Each of the above – and more – is already under consideration. Additionally, let's not forget 2019's so-called "Green New Deal" that, among other actions, seeks to make New York's electricity 100% carbon neutral over the next two decades. It may well be a new deal but I remain far from convinced that it's a fair deal for future taxpayers or energy consumers for whom the cost of energy will rise. It is a massive undertaking. It calls for a huge investment in new technologies and infrastructure with no cost/benefit analysis whatsoever.

The New York Energy Research and Development Authority, better known as NYSERDA, has recently said that the state will have to spend an additional \$12.7 billion through 2024 just to begin the implementation of the Green New Deal. A recently leaked draft report of the New York Climate Action Council, which is charged with developing the overall plan, indicates that the costs and who pays them should be figured out as the plan is implemented. No joke!

Let me remind you that this is all to lessen New York's 0.4% portion of global greenhouse gas emissions. New York State has been, and rightly should be, a leader in actions toward a cleaner environment. I and my Republican colleagues embrace taking reasonable and rational steps to reduce emissions. But at what cost to taxpayers and businesses across the state? It's unknown at this time. And to what benefit for New Yorkers? Even if New York were to get its 0.4% of global emissions to zero, it will have no discernable impact on climate change globally nor its impact on New York itself. These actions must be done globally to make any difference. Asking these basic questions do not make us climate deniers as the zealots would have you believe. These are questions that the taxpayers of New York deserve answers to, and I am bound and determined to get them.

Over the past two years of one-party control, I have consistently raised the specter of state borrowing and debt, particularly the burden being kicked down the road to future generations of decision makers and, especially, taxpayers.

New York already has America's highest state and local government debt per capita. Most of it has been accomplished through state borrowing, significantly adding to future state debt and, most egregiously, being heaped onto the backs of future taxpayers who will have to deal with it long after

New York's current decision makers are long gone out of office.

I have said it before, it bears repeating: The new, Democrat direction for New York State is producing billions upon billions of dollars of short- and long-term spending commitments requiring billions upon billions of dollars in new taxes, fees, and, especially, borrowing for future generations of state and local taxpayers.

This relentless pursuit of a far-left, socialist, extreme-liberal political agenda appears to be the priority over a long-term, sustainable future for upstate, middle-class communities, families, workers, businesses, industries, and taxpayers.

In other words, hold on to your wallets heading into the new year in New York State government.

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