



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Senator O'Mara's weekly column 'From the Capitol' -- for the week of January 23, 2023 -- 'Committee assignments at the center of key challenges'

THOMAS F. O'MARA January 23, 2023

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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, "Committee assignments at the center of key challenges"

At the start of the 2023 legislative session, I have been appointed to several key Senate committees that impact the direction of state fiscal policies as well as criminal justice and law enforcement, energy and broadband development, regulatory reform, and government investigations and oversight.

Simply put, it's a full plate in a lawmaking institution where Senate Republicans fight uphill, on so many fronts, while every branch of New York government (legislative, executive, and judicial) remains firmly under one-party, all-Democrat control. That's not a partisan lament. It's simply a fact in New York State government at the moment. New York's governor is a Democrat. Democrat-led supermajorities control both the state Senate and Assembly. Every justice of New York's highest court, the Court of Appeals, has been appointed by a Democrat governor. The state's comptroller and attorney general are Democrats.

Nevertheless, these committee assignments place my focus squarely at the center of several of the state's most challenging and critical debates. Most critically, they offer opportunities to be a voice for our Senate Republican Conference -- as well as for the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions I represent -- as we focus on policies that we believe would most effectively address the best interests of taxpayers, workers, small business owners, manufacturers, farmers, schools, law enforcement, and all the other foundations of our local communities and citizens.

For example, I will continue serving as the Ranking Member on the Senate Finance Committee, the Senate committee most responsible for overseeing the adoption of the state's annual budget and setting the course for New York's short- and long-term fiscal practices and responsibilities. It will be a chance to keep fighting for responsible and effective state fiscal practices at a time when state government spending, in my view and the opinions of many others, has gone irresponsibly out of control. This state must address high taxes, unrestrained spending, unfunded mandates, and overregulation. We need to keep working against a tax and regulatory climate that puts our businesses and manufacturers at severe competitive disadvantages and imposes red tape that strangles local economies.

I have also been reappointed as the Ranking Member on the Senate Investigations and Government Operations Committee. The across-the-board Democrat control of New York State government demands strong oversight with checks and balances. The Legislature has failed in this necessary function.

I first received this assignment in July 2020 when the Senate and Assembly were preparing to begin public hearings that August on the COVID-19 nursing home tragedy. It will forever be one of the most egregious chapters in this state's history and we still don't have the answers we need and deserve over why and how it happened. Significant questions were raised, and continued to be raised, over the former Cuomo administration's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic in New York State's nursing homes. It remains my strong belief that an honest and thorough investigation of state actions throughout the pandemic is necessary. It remains troubling that Governor Hochul has failed to make this investigation a top priority.

The future of state energy policies will remain under the spotlight in 2023 as the Hochul administration moves forward on what many, including myself, consider a radical remaking of New York's energy future with significant impacts on affordability and reliability. It may very well be the most significant action underway in state government that will impact the lives and pocketbooks of all New Yorkers. Consequently, in my capacity as a member of the Senate Energy and Telecommunications Committee, it will be a priority to continue raising awareness as well as concerns over the plan's affordability, reliability, and sustainability.

Additionally, two committees I will serve on throughout this current session govern the areas of criminal justice and law enforcement, the Codes Committee and the Judiciary Committee. From misguided bail and parole reform to an ever-growing "defund the police" movement, we have seen over the past several years this Legislature move in directions that many of us believe pose a danger to public safety and security. New York State has become less safe and we need to keep working against anti-law enforcement policies, stand behind our police officers, and resist radical efforts that threaten the quality, safety, stability, and strength of our communities and neighborhoods.

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