



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Senator O'Mara's weekly column 'From the Capitol' -- for the week of March 27, 2023 -- 'It's a progressive free-for-all in New York State'

THOMAS F. O'MARA March 27, 2023

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On so many critical challenges, it's a far-left, progressive free-for-all. Or, depending on your point of view, it's a progressive free fall resulting in this state's decline.

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, "It's a progressive free-for-all in New York State"

With Governor Hochul and the Legislature's Democrat majorities starting negotiations over a new state budget, the battle lines are drawn and alarms are sounding throughout the halls of the State Capitol.

From criminal justice to health care to workforce development, advocacy groups and their legislative supporters make it clear that they are all-in -- forget the consequences -- on moving New York State in an extremely liberal, often radical, big spending, high taxing, so-called "progressive" direction.

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Pay attention.

Upstate United led off one recent news release this way: "With progressive legislators in the Capitol pushing bills that will drastically hike the state's minimum wage and lead to significant job losses, reduced worker hours, income reductions, and closures across New York, business groups gathered in the Capitol this afternoon to urge caution and common sense."

Caution and common sense out of Albany? That's about as far as you can get from accurately defining New York government under one-party, all-Democrat control.

Let's stay focused on this extreme push for a higher minimum wage, keeping in mind that New York's minimum wage has been steadily rising since 2016. It's not on a fast-enough track for some progressive legislators, who would immediately jack it up to \$20 per hour (and even higher in some parts of the state).

The consequences? According to the National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB), raising the minimum wage this way would lead to at least 128,000 lost jobs over the coming decade, with 65% of the losses suffered by small businesses. The lost economic output for small businesses alone would approach \$12 billion. We know what a hard hit that would be for small, rural communities throughout the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions, and across Upstate where small businesses are already struggling to remain the backbone of local economies.

The future for manufacturing workers? One recent report revealed that since 2016, when the state began implementing its current minimum wage escalation, nearly 40% of manufacturers have increased automation at their factories. In other words, fewer jobs and less weekly hours for the manufacturing workforce.

Keep in mind also, as Upstate United highlights, this “ill-advised legislative drive comes on the heels of New York’s complete failure to restore the Unemployment Insurance (UI) Trust Fund, which was depleted by the COVID pandemic and state-mandated business shutdowns and restrictions.”

The consequences for family farmers and the agricultural industry as a whole? Let’s not forget that this push for a higher minimum wage arrives on the heels of the Hochul administration giving the go-ahead to reducing the threshold for farmworker overtime pay from 60 to 40 hours -- a move that already puts at risk the future of many family farms. What would be the result of piling a 40% increase in the minimum wage on top of that misguided move?

New York Farm Bureau President David Fisher states, “If it is increased, the alternatives for farms will be to find ways to cut employee hours, move away from labor intensive crops or simply close up shop, something more than 2,000 farms have done since lawmakers passed the last wage hike. Let’s push pause on higher mandated labor costs, giving small businesses the time to catch up to the high inflation and protecting our local food system from further demise.”

According to the Grow NY Farms Coalition, “Any increase in farm wages will cripple our rural communities and put the security of our state’s food supply and the economic viability of the entire agriculture industry at risk. With inflation and farm inputs still on the rise, now is not the time to double down and increase costs further. We urge our state leaders to consider the current economic landscape and uniqueness of critical industries like agriculture before making rushed decisions.”

Those are words of common sense. However, as I noted above, caution and common sense are given no heed whatsoever in the out-of-control, “progressive” free fall driving this state down.

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