



Dear Constituent:

Throughout 2019, I heard from thousands of Southern Tier and Finger Lakes constituents on challenges and issues ranging from agriculture to transportation, and from community safety to workforce development.

I appreciate the input and I hope it continues throughout this New Year.

With this in mind, I will be undertaking a few specific initiatives to encourage area residents to share opinions and suggestions for better government. For example, I will once again make available on my State Senate website (<http://www.omara.nysenate.gov>) the annual online legislative survey seeking local input on a range of the key concerns facing the entire region and New York State as a whole. Keep an eye out for it and I hope you can find the time to respond.

It represents just one more way to seek opinions and thoughts from across the 58th Senate District I represent.

I also hope you will make our offices your first stop if you ever have a question about, want to express an opinion on, or need assistance from New York State government.

As always, thank you for your interest and participation.

My very best wishes to you and your family for a safe and successful 2020.

Sincerely,

NYS Senator Tom O'Mara
58th District



SENATOR O'MARA HIGHLIGHTS "ALARMING DEBT FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS"



According to the State Comptroller, New York's current total State debt, roughly \$65 billion, is second only to that of California. In other words, New York State has the second-highest debt total in America.

The Albany-based Empire Center, using data from the U.S. Census Bureau and Bureau of Economic Analysis, puts State and local government debt per person in New York State at \$17,528. That equals the highest debt rate per capita in the United States, significantly higher than the next highest state, Massachusetts (\$13,733).

This debt load will reach nearly \$72 billion over the next several years, the Comptroller predicts, with the State projected to issue "50 percent more debt than it will retire." By the end of the State's 2021-2022 fiscal year, State taxpayers will be on the hook for more than \$8 billion a year just to service the State's existing debt. Not to reduce the debt, keep in mind, only to keep up with the required payments, especially interest, over time.

"The bill to future generations of taxpayers will be stunning," says Senator O'Mara. "Among many consequences, rising debt limits the State's ability to enhance ongoing programs and services, or cut taxes and eliminate fees."

The fact of New York State's current debt load raises plenty of questions and numerous proposals for reform. However, at the start of the 2020 Legislative Session, Senator O'Mara's point is straightforward: The next time you read or hear about the latest call for bigger spending by New York State government, remember the debt load taxpayers already shoulder. It is already the second-heaviest burden in the nation. It is already on track to keep rising, significantly, without any help at all from New York State's next big spenders.

It is an incredibly complicated fix, according to the Senator, and its complexity or difficulty cannot be simplified. Nevertheless, controlling State spending for the long term strikes Senator O'Mara as priority number one. It is at least one common sense strategy and the reason he has long supported and voted for enacting a permanent, strict cap on annual State government spending.

"The less the State spends on ever-growing, and larger and larger programs and services, the more fiscal flexibility the State will have to focus on doing things like cutting taxes or more rapidly reducing debt," says Senator O'Mara. "We have to get a handle on it. We have to become serious about getting it under control. The practice of 'pay as you go' needs to become the norm, not the exception."

Big government spending in New York State is not new to the scene. In addition to current big spending practices, the current debt burden is also the result of continually neglecting, over time, the consequences of past bad spending practices.

Senator O'Mara says, "The burden on future generations is already alarming. We better get focused on making it more manageable, not making it worse."

SENATOR O'MARA OPPOSES COLLEGE TUITION ASSISTANCE, DRIVER'S LICENSES FOR ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS

Senator O'Mara pointed to new laws providing free college tuition assistance to the children of illegal immigrants and allowing illegal immigrants to obtain a State driver's license as two of the most controversial actions taken in 2019.

Senator O'Mara strongly opposed and voted against both new laws, and warned that additional actions providing taxpayer-financed benefits to illegal immigrants could be on the way.

One new law (S1250/A782, Chapter 26 of the Laws of 2019), known as the "DREAM Act," will provide State taxpayer-financed college tuition assistance to the children of illegal immigrants. The implementation of the DREAM Act is estimated to cost the State approximately \$27 million annually once fully implemented.

Senator O'Mara said, "We have law-abiding, hard-working families across the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions struggling to make ends meet, paying outrageously high State and local taxes, and going into huge amounts of debt trying to afford college for their children. It's not right to ignore the needs and the hopes of these families while we turn around and deliver hard-earned taxpayer dollars to provide free college tuition for illegal immigrant families."

The second measure (S1747/A3675, Chapter 37), widely known as the "Green Light" law, would allow New York to issue State driver's licenses to illegal immigrants. Governor Cuomo made the law's enactment one

of his top priorities during last year's Legislative Session.

The new law would permit illegal immigrants to apply for a standard New York State driver's license using forms of foreign identification. Among numerous concerns, Senator O'Mara and other opponents argue that county clerks and employees at local Departments of Motor Vehicles (DMV) are unable to verify the authenticity of foreign IDs.

The New York Association of County Clerks opposed the move. County clerks in Erie and Rensselaer are among those who have filed lawsuits challenging the law's validity.

Only twelve states and the District of Columbia allow illegal immigrants to obtain a driver's license.

Senator O'Mara criticized the Green Light law as reckless.

"This State is speeding down a radical, irresponsible road to ruin as a high-taxing, big-spending haven for lawbreakers," said Senator O'Mara. "Lawbreaking illegal immigrants should never be rewarded with a government-issued driver's license. It puts public safety and security at risk, imposes another unfunded mandate on counties, and asks local, law-abiding public servants to enforce the law by issuing these licenses."

SENATOR O'MARA: "ALWAYS GRATEFUL FOR OPPORTUNITIES TO ASSIST OUR LOCAL POLICE AGENCIES AND FIRE DEPARTMENTS"

In early November, Senator O'Mara and Assemblyman Phil Palmesano visited the Village of Bath Volunteer Fire Department on Morris Street to help local officials celebrate the Department's newly acquired Ladder Truck and the Village's new police vehicle.

Senator O'Mara and Assemblyman Palmesano secured \$700,000 as part of the 2018-2019 New York State Budget to assist the Village in purchasing the new vehicles while saving Village and town taxpayers two-thirds of the cost.

In a joint statement, Senator O'Mara and Assemblyman Palmesano said, "We are always grateful for the opportunity to assist our local police agencies, and fire departments and first responders. These new fire and police vehicles will better serve Bath residents, enhance the personal safety of firefighters and police officers, and ease the burden on local property taxpayers. Thank you to Mayor von Hagn, Supervisor Smith, Bath's firefighters and police officers, and their fellow first responders throughout the region for their outstanding service to save lives, protect property, and keep our communities and neighborhoods safe."

The area State legislators were joined by Bath Mayor William von Hagn, Town of Bath Supervisor Ronald Smith, Bath Fire Chief Matthew Glashauser, Bath Chief of Police Chad Mullen, firefighters, police officers, and other local officials (see accompanying photo).

Mayor von Hagn said, "Our police and firefighters are dedicated professionals and having the tools to take care of us is critical to the members of our community. Thank you Senator O'Mara and Assemblyman Palmesano for your continued support to the residents of both the Village and Town of Bath."

Fire Chief Glashauser said, "We are extremely grateful for their dedication to serve the people of our community by reducing a huge financial burden to only one-third of the cost. Our job as firefighters is a hard one, but it could not be done without the support from our Village Board and the strong support from the State of New York."

The Fire Department purchased the new Ladder Truck to replace an outdated, 30-year-old truck. It will enhance the Department's firefighting capabilities for its district and the surrounding area. The Department provides fire services to both the Village and Town of Bath.

The new, fully equipped police vehicle ensures that the Village maintains a fleet of four patrol cars.



MEDICAID REFORM BACK IN THE SPOTLIGHT AS SPENDING EXPLODES

Senator O'Mara a longtime advocate for cutting waste, controlling spending

Medicaid watchdogs in New York have long stressed the importance of combatting and preventing the fraud, waste, and other abuses that plague a system now providing benefits to at least one-third of State residents.

Overall spending on Medicaid is nearly \$80 billion, nearly one-half of New York's entire State Budget. It is only projected to grow. In fact, the State Budget Division recently warned that Medicaid spending "continues to exceed expectations."

Now comes the news that the State is facing a more than \$6-billion budget shortfall in the coming year largely due to ballooning Medicaid spending. It will be a defining issue of the 2020 Legislative Session.

It should come as no surprise. Over the past several years, efforts to rein in Medicaid spending have been accompanied by unprecedented efforts to direct more and more New Yorkers into the program. As noted above, at least one-third of all New Yorkers now receive some form of Medicaid benefit.

Yet, it remains a system too often undermined by abuse, fraud and waste. Not long ago, the State Comptroller revealed that the State Medicaid program made more than \$100 million in duplicate payments. The Comptroller noted, "System flaws and incorrect or incomplete information have caused duplicate Medicaid premium payments for a long time. The Department of Health needs to do a better job coordinating with all stakeholders in the Medicaid system to eliminate this waste, improve efficiency and streamline communication."

For many years, Senator O'Mara, among other Medicaid reform measures, has sponsored legislation to reimburse counties for the cost of purchasing Medicaid fraud detection software that helps pinpoint cases of fraud, waste,

and other abuses. Putting a stop to Medicaid fraud and mismanagement must remain a priority at every level of government. Fraud and waste continues to cost taxpayers across the nation billions upon billions of dollars.

"For starters, in this day and age of remarkable modern technology," said Senator O'Mara, "this mismanagement should be a thing of the past. Taxpayers need and deserve a zero-tolerance policy on Medicaid abuse, fraud, and waste."

The more widespread use of cutting-edge "data mining" software could save taxpayers in New York State alone hundreds of millions of dollars, the Senator added. He has long advocated, for example, the more widespread utilization of data-mining software like that developed by the Horseheads-based Salient Corporation. The case for its use to sheriff a system like Medicaid becomes stronger as this technology is continually fine-tuned and increasingly sophisticated.

Furthermore, the current system places an enormous burden on local property taxpayers. Mayors, county executives, and other local officials throughout the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions, and statewide, continually point to Medicaid as their most burdensome and costly unfunded State mandate.

As enrollment figures continue to soar, it becomes clearer by the day that counties and local property taxpayers simply cannot sustain this burden. New York State needs to take over the local share of Medicaid from counties and implement meaningful, system wide cost-saving reforms.

"The time has come to address it," said Senator O'Mara.

LOCAL GST BOCES STUDENT HONORED AS "STUDENT OF THE YEAR"



Senator O'Mara and Assemblyman Chris Friend congratulated Carrie Parkhurst of Chemung County, who was among a group of adult education students from across New York State honored in 2019 as a "Student of the Year" by the New York Association for Continuing/Community Education (NYACCE).

Carrie was nominated for the award by the Greater Southern Tier BOCES (GST BOCES) Adult Education and Training Services to recognize her successful completion of the TASC Program, along with her exemplary work ethic and positive attitude. The NYACCE is the professional organization representing adult education professionals

statewide.

Senator O'Mara said, "This recognition is a real tribute to Carrie's determination, optimism and strength. She recognized the powerful difference that education makes to a fuller, more successful and more hopeful life, and she pursued the opportunities offered by GST BOCES with great energy and a positive outlook. Carrie is a true inspiration to her classmates and a great source of pride to the administration and staff of the GST BOCES."

Carrie enrolled in the TASC program more than 30 years after attending high school. Her instructor, Georgiana Horvath, said that Carrie faced the challenges of the rigorous classwork and took her studies seriously while holding numerous jobs and managing a household.

She said, "Carrie Parkhurst is a perfect example of the student we as instructors want in our Adult Ed programs – and the reason our TASC programs need to exist – so that adult students like Carrie can get that second chance," Horvath said.

To help commemorate the tribute locally, Senator O'Mara and Assemblyman Friend presented Carrie with a Legislative Proclamation which states, in part, "It is the sense of this Legislative Body to take note of those individuals who have distinguished themselves through their exemplary pursuit of education as adults... While Carrie Parkhurst's journey to pursue adult education and high school equivalency diploma classes took some unusual twists and turns, Carrie was able to rise to every challenge and has consistently stayed on course."



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FUTURE LEADERS WELCOMED TO CAPITOL DURING LEGISLATURE'S "WEST POINT DAY"

Senator O'Mara helps pay tribute to Corning native

Senator O'Mara and Assemblyman Phil Palmesano annually join legislative colleagues at the Capitol to host "West Point Day" and pay tribute to West Point cadets from around New York State.

Last May, this tribute included Corning native and West Point junior Lili Ruland.

The United States Military Academy at West Point, located in Orange County in New York's Hudson River Valley, is the oldest continuously operating military post in the United States. It began operating in 1802 during the presidency of Thomas Jefferson.

Senator O'Mara and Assemblyman Palmesano said, "The Legislature's 'West Point Day' provides a yearly opportunity to pay tribute to the historic contributions that this prestigious military institution has made to the strength of our nation and peace throughout the world. We were equally proud this year for the opportunity to recognize Cadet Lili Ruland of Corning and express our gratitude for her deep commitment to serving the United States of America. Cadet Ruland and all of her fellow cadets are among America's most outstanding young men and women who are destined to become our nation's future leaders. Lili is an enormous source of pride to her family and friends, and our entire region."

Lili is the daughter of Kenneth and Jennifer Ruland of Corning. She is a 2014 graduate of Corning-Painted Post East High School.

In the accompanying photo, from the floor of the New York State Assembly Chamber, Senator O'Mara and Assemblyman Palmesano welcomed Cadet Ruland and thanked her for her commitment.

As part of West Point Day, the area lawmakers also co-sponsored a Legislative Resolution honoring West Point, Cadet Ruland, and all of the current cadets. The resolution reads, in part, "The leadership and sacrifices of the members of the Long Grey Line have helped this country withstand countless threats to our cherished democratic way of life. The Academy continues to provide our country with able and dedicated future leaders...Our Nation has enjoyed the legacy of freedom and the United States Military Academy at West Point has played a vitally significant role in the maintenance of peace and freedom."

An estimated 1,200 new cadets enter West Point each year. Currently, there are over 4,000 cadets enrolled at the academy from every state in the United States, as well as from several foreign countries. Upon their graduation, West Point cadets are deployed throughout the world and serve on active military duty for at least five years.

