



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pete Harckham

## Harckham's Bills Offering Recognition to Iraq and Afghanistan War Veterans Signed into Law

PETE HARCKHAM November 28, 2023

| ISSUE: **SENATOR HARCKHAM. SD40, IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN VETERANS, ARMED SERVICE MEMBERS, ARMED SERVICES**



*Albany, NY* – New York State Senator Pete Harckham announced today that his two bills establishing special commemorative medals to veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, respectively, have been signed into law by Governor Kathy Hochul. The bills were part of Harckham's continuing effort to provide greater recognition and support of veterans of armed service statewide and ensure they receive the benefits they have rightfully earned.

“I thank Governor Hochul for enacting this legislation,” said Harckham. “Showing residents of New York who have served in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars our real appreciation for their service, valor and sacrifice requires much more than a ‘thank you,’ parades and a holiday. While these commemorative medals are a symbolic recognition of this service, our prevailing concern and care for the well-being of our veterans needs to be absolute, always.”

Harckham serves on the Senate Veterans, Homeland Security and Military Affairs Committee.

The first new law ([S.5372A](#)) authorizes the Adjutant General (the state’s highest ranking military official in the New York National Guard) to present in the name of the State Legislature a medal to be known as the “New York State Afghanistan War Commemorative Medal” to members of the armed forces who served abroad in Afghanistan from October 2001 through August 2021. It is not required for recipients of this medal to have been residents of New York during the time of this service.

The second new law ([S.5394A](#)) allows a “New York State Iraq War Commemorative Medal” to be presented to members of the armed forces who served abroad in Iraq from March 2003 until December 18, 2011. Both bills passed the State Legislature with bipartisan support. The two new laws will take effect on April 1, 2024.

“The men and women who will now be recognized by the State of New York for their selfless sacrifices in Iraq and Afghanistan are true heroes,” said Sean Witoshynsky, an E-6 Technical Sergeant in the Air Force and Commander of VFW Post 9257 in Putnam Lake. “Residents of New York State have served in every conflict from the Revolutionary War to the battlefields of the Middle East. It is truly fitting that these two bills were signed into law on Veterans Day. I believe a nation should never forget its history or the men and women who had a hand in writing it. I hope that this kind of recognition for our state’s veterans continues and

would like to take this opportunity to thank the Governor Hochul and State Senator Pete Harckham for their strong, unwavering support of those who have served this nation.”

In 2019, Harckham established a Veterans Advisory Board that meets regularly; it is where some of the veteran-focused legislation he has introduced first was suggested. In addition, Harckham has been instrumental in ensuring continued annual state funding for the PFC Joseph P. Dwyer Vet 2 Vet Program, a peer counseling and support initiative, and the program’s recent expansion across the state.

Previously, Governor Hochul enacted into law four veterans-focused bills that Harckham introduced. One new law improved communications between healthcare providers and veterans and their family members in order to increase access to health benefits. Another law designated a pedestrian bridge over the Taconic Parkway as the Atomic Veterans Memorial Bridge in recognition of service members exposed to atomic weapons testing. The third law established a council of treatment equity within the Office of Addiction Services and Supports to represent previously underrepresented populations, including veterans. The last law renamed a section of Route 121 as the “John Jay High School Veterans Memorial Highway.”

Additionally, Harckham successfully pushed to have the New York State Division of Veterans’ Services instituted as a full statewide agency, which will give it a more central role in determining its funding and role in relation to other statewide agencies.

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#### RELATED LEGISLATION

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**2023-S5372A**

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- Introduced
  - - In Committee Assembly
    - In Committee Senate
  - - On Floor Calendar Assembly
    - On Floor Calendar Senate
  - - Passed Assembly
    - Passed Senate
  - Delivered to Governor
  - Signed By Governor
  -

Relates to the issuance of a New York State Afghanistan War Commemorative Medal

March 03, 2023

Senate Floor Calendar

Sponsored by **Pete Harckham**

Do you support this bill?