



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Greg Ball

## Chairman Ball Spearheads Historic Veteran's "Hill Day"

GREG BALL March 14, 2011

### *Calls Cuts to Veterans "Cruel and Unusual Punishment"*

ALBANY, NY (March 14, 2011)— A Bus of veterans, deemed the "Patriot Express," left from Senator Greg Ball's (R, C—Patterson) district office at 7:00 am this morning transporting over one hundred veterans from throughout the Hudson Valley to today's historic committee meeting, hearing and Senate session. The veterans are part of a large group of veterans which descended upon the Capitol today to lobby for important legislation and vital services.

The Senator chaired a meeting of the Homeland Security, Veterans and Military Affairs Committee, where several key pieces of veterans legislation were introduced. Including bills: S3901 and S3900 creating penalties and making protesting at the funeral service of a member of the military illegal, S3956 creating a Cold War Veterans Medal and S3954 allowing those serving on active duty to be awarded full pension credit.

The Senator, wanting to hear directly from the veterans community, also hosted a public hearing where he and his colleagues were joined by veterans to discuss recurring needs within the veterans community while thoroughly analyzing some of the devastating impacts of the executive's proposed budget.

Ball said, “The Governor’s proposed cuts to the State Veterans Home Program would be devastating and represent cruel and unusual punishment to our nation’s heroes. As if pushing veterans out into the cold, into non-state veterans homes or worse isn’t harsh enough, it’s also fiscally irresponsible. This federal program is a net cash positive for us and brings in over \$6 million per year to New York State government coffers.”

Several members of the veterans community spoke on the importance of funding for New York States Veterans Homes. As of today five state veterans facilities are operating at 97% capacity filling the available 1220 beds. Frank Scagna, the executive director of the Stony Brook Veterans Home in Long Island testified that the governors proposed 21% reduction in funds to the VA would be a tremendous disservice to the 1 million veterans residing in the state. “The VA is currently operating on a waiting list, these cuts would mean 260 fewer beds. We provide care for all of the states veterans form the greatest generation to the latest generation this organization is an asset to the State of New York it should not be treated as a burden.” Willy Nazzerio, of the Military Order of the Purple Heart also strongly urged those present at the hearing to protect the states veterans homes, outlining the important programs that are being utilized everyday at places like Montrose VA Hospital. Mr. Nazzerio, feeling so strongly about the issue that he ended his testimony by informing the Senators and Assemblyman “If you are going to bulldoze Montrose, you are going to have to bulldoze me with it.”

Many at the hearing also touched upon the issue of services for returning veterans. Matteo Bonomo an Iraq veteran and student at Berkeley College spoke about his struggles with knowing what options were available to him when he returned home. “When I was discharged they rushed me out of the office in less than thirty minutes, I wasn’t told anything about what I was entitled to regarding medical care or education from the GI bill. My family friends and I had to go on Google and figure everything out for ourselves.”

Mathew Tulley an attorney with Tully Rinckey, and an Iraq veteran, spoke about Senator Ball's legislation that would allow service disabled veterans preference in getting state contracts. "Without the state contracting preference provided in S.2423, service-disabled veteran-owned businesses such as my own do not stand a fair chance to procure any contracts with New York State. It's David versus Goliath; the mom-and-pop store versus the mega center. Given all of the sacrifices U.S. service members have made since 9/11, I'd say it is about time New York State reassessed its priorities and asked whether the men and women who fight for our nation deserve to remain at the bottom of the priority list."

Senator Ball, a former Air Force Captain and U.S. Air Force Academy Graduate stated, "As we wage a massive and prolonged war on multiple fronts, and as thousands of our WWII veterans perish each month, now is absolutely not the time to be cutting vital services and balancing our state budget on the backs of these cherished heroes."

At both the 10:30 am press conference and the 11:00 am hearing representatives spoke on a wide range of issues from the closing of veterans homes and the elimination of vital VA services to the effects of atomic testing on military veterans.

In response to the specific needs of Atomic Veterans living in the Hudson Valley, Senator Ball has introduced S3097. Ball said, "just like the brave men who were treated by our government like guinea pigs as atomic test cases in WWII, we now have troops on this very day, not as tests, but in the course of their service, have reportedly suffered radioactive contamination. As we get caught up in Albany and discuss the budget, lets realize that there are men and women who have fought for our freedom who deserve our fullest attention and care, regardless of how tough the economic climate is."

Senator Ball made these comments within moments of 17 U.S. Navy crewmembers having

been reported to have been contaminated with low-levels of radiation during disaster relief missions in Japan. The radioactivity was detected when the service members returned to the aircraft carrier Ronald Reagan. The U.S. 7th Fleet was in proximity of a failing Japanese nuclear power plant and also reported "airborne radioactivity." Ed Gettler an atomic veteran joined the Senator, and shared his story "no amount of radiation is healthy," Gettler stated "and no human being should ever have been used as a science experiment."

Chairman Ball said, "Speaking individually to these brave men and women has been striking and has hit me at my core. People have to realize that all of these issues, from posttraumatic stress disorder to atomic contamination, are as real today as they were when the troops returned home after WWII. We have Korean War, WWII and other vets living in our communities who are just now suffering from their first signs of PTSD and they need vital services and support. We can't be slashing our veteran's homes as proposed in the Executive's budget and we can't be winding down services at Montrose, when we should be expanding. It's not just those troops now returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, and we are absolutely not doing enough for them, it's all of our veterans. They all need us."

Ball also spearheaded a vote on several historic bills on the Senate floor, including bills: S2421 ensuring that the ballots of deceased military personnel shall be counted, S1728 protecting against desecration of veteran graves and S3484 a landmark bill establishing a recruitment incentive and retention program for the New York Army National Guard, Air National Guard and Naval Militia.

The Senator urged his colleagues in the Assembly "to pass the legislation as well, and lets reach across the aisle and from both houses to simply do what is right and just. These men and women are the best of America and the best of New York and they deserve no less