



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Catharine Young

Senator Young Announces Legislation to Protect Families From Protests at Military Funerals

CATHARINE YOUNG June 17, 2011

| ISSUE: **MILITARY**

OLEAN – Protestors will have a more difficult time disrupting military funerals thanks to legislation co-sponsored and passed by Senator Catharine Young (R,C,I – Olean).

“Those who fight and die in the service of our country deserve our highest respect and their families have earned the right to bury their loved ones in peace. This is very important legislation that allows our military families to mourn free from unwarranted messages of hate,” said Senator Young.

Senator Young, who attended the funeral of Westfield resident Sgt. Kevin White who was killed on May 2nd in Afghanistan, was appalled to hear that protesters had threatened to protest outside the memorial service.

“Thankfully, for the sake of Sgt. White’s family, those protestors never came but the same does not hold true for many other families of fallen servicemen and servicewomen,” said Senator Young.

“We have a brave woman from Western New York who was just killed in Afghanistan two weeks ago. While one can only imagine the tremendous pain her family is feeling right now, that is not stopping hateful people who want to spew their message of intolerance at her funeral. It is unconscionable and needs to be stopped,” she added.

Members of the radical Westboro Baptist Church of Topeka, Kansas plan to attend the funeral of Army Sgt. Devin Snyder who will be buried Saturday in her hometown of Cohocton after she was killed June 4 when insurgents attacked her unit with an improvised explosive device.

The independent Baptist church is known for its extreme views and protest activities, which include picketing military funerals with members carrying signs with vulgar and obscene messages. Church members often target military funerals, claiming the deaths of servicemen and servicewomen are God’s way of punishing Americans for their acceptance of homosexuals.

A recent U.S. Supreme Court decision recognized that persons who protest at funerals of military personnel have constitutional rights, but also found that states have a compelling interest in protecting the family and friends of deceased military personnel while they are

mourning at such events.

Senator Young said the two bills passed by the Legislature earlier this week balance the constitutional right of free speech with the ability of families to respectfully mourn the individuals who gave their lives in service to their country.

One bill triples the buffer zone for protests around religious services, funerals, burials or memorial services from 100 to 300 feet. The other authorizes a permit process for demonstrations at veterans' funerals and levies fines for failure to comply.

Both measures await the Governor's signature.

"The Governor needs to sign these bills so our heroes are buried with the honor and dignity they deserve," Senator Young said.