



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

## Stars, Stripes and a Salute to Our Nation

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### Senator Ritchie's Weekly Column

This week, many people will join friends and family members to fire up the grill, load up the cooler, and find that perfect spot to watch a spectacle in the sky for the Fourth of July holiday. But, the Fourth is so much more than cookouts and fireworks displays. It's a chance to salute our nation—as well as those who defend it.

This year, our nation will celebrate its 237<sup>th</sup> birthday. It was on July 4<sup>th</sup> 1776 that the Declaration of Independence was approved by the Continental Congress, declaring the 13 colonies a free nation. If you'd like to read the document for yourself, you can request a copy by clicking [here](#).

When the Declaration of Independence was signed, 2.5 million people were living in the newly-independent nation. Today, that number has grown to 316.2 million. Here's a few ways those millions of people will celebrate, by the numbers:

- \$227.3 million. That's the value of fireworks—many of which are used on the Fourth of July—imported into the United States annually;
- More than 14,000 fireworks displays are expected to light up the night sky in celebration of our country's independence;
- 32 percent of people will celebrate by attending a Fourth of July parade;
- It's the most popular day for cooking out, as 90 percent of grill owners will be flipping burgers, hot dogs and much more;
- Speaking of grilling, on the Fourth, Americans will eat roughly 150 million hot dogs and purchase around 700 million pounds of chicken for cookouts with family and friends.

Not only is Independence Day a celebration of our nation, it's an opportunity give thanks to those who bravely safeguard our country and our freedom. It's often said that freedom is not free; and living in such close proximity to Fort Drum, we see on an almost daily basis the sacrifices our troops make for our country.

I encourage you not only over the Fourth of July holiday, but year round, to thank our men and women in uniform by taking steps to support them. It's as simple as volunteering at your local USO, providing letters and care packages to soldiers by participating in the "Adopt a Platoon" program or donating to

initiatives like the “Wounded Warrior Project,” which aims to assist injured service members.

Whether you’re attending a cookout, taking in a parade or enjoying one of the many fireworks displays taking place in our region, I would like to wish you both a safe and happy Fourth of July holiday and again, urge you to take time to thank the brave men and women who protect both our nation and our freedom.