



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

85 State Lawmakers Join to Stand Up for Fort Drum

PATTY RITCHIE April 1, 2014

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Ritchie, Blankenbush Lead Effort to Rally Support for NY's Largest Military Post

A bipartisan group of 85 State Senators and Assembly Members—from Long Island to Buffalo, Brooklyn and Binghamton to the North Country—have joined together to back Fort Drum in the face of looming federal defense budget cuts.

The lawmakers signed a letter to Governor Cuomo asking him to rally state leaders in Albany, New York City and Washington, D.C., to fight for the post, which is crucial to the nation's defense and, as the state's largest single-site employer, adds almost \$2 billion a year to New York's economy.

[CLICK HERE TO READ THE LETTER](#)

The signers include 58 Republicans and 27 Democrats, and at least 13 veterans of the US Armed Forces. Copies of the letter were sent to members of the state's Congressional delegation.

“The men and women of Fort Drum and throughout our Armed Forces stand ready to answer the nation's call to defend freedom. We owe it to them to stand together on behalf of Fort Drum and the courageous members of the 10th Mountain Division,” said the letter.

The effort was organized by Senator Patty Ritchie and Assemblyman Ken Blankenbush in response to a call by the post's Senior Commander, Brigadier General Michael Howard, during the Sen. Ritchie-sponsored Senate “Fort Drum Day” last month. Gen. Howard told lawmakers that Pentagon leaders would weigh the level of support from state leaders in choosing where to make deep defense cuts.

“A few years ago, many state leaders had never heard of Fort Drum, but thanks in part to the Senate's ‘Fort Drum Day’ and the efforts of local community leaders, we have now been able to rally support from across New York State for this critical economic engine of the North Country,” Senator Ritchie said.

“Fort Drum is not just a North Country asset, it is New York's major Army post, an important part our state economy and our nation's defense, and communities across this great state have an interest in ensuring it stays strong.”

Assemblyman Ken Blankenbush said, “In the North Country, we already understand Fort Drum's importance to our local communities. Thanks to Senator Ritchie and Fort Drum Day, the rest of state is beginning to understand too, and the strong support shown by this effort can help convince Washington that New York State stands squarely behind our soldiers and Fort Drum.”

Senator Ritchie created Fort Drum Day, now in its third year, to raise awareness of the post, the largest military installation in the Northeastern US. On March 18, Gen. Howard traveled to the Capitol along with a cadre of soldiers and officers, organized displays of military personnel and hardware, met with Lt. Gov. Robert Duffy and delivered formal remarks in the Senate, which is a rare honor offered to few non-elected individuals.

Gen. Howard told lawmakers that the Army plans to cut its troop strength by as much as 15 percent nationwide, but could not predict how the cuts would impact Fort Drum.

“Our senior leadership has stated repeatedly they want to hear from elected leaders so that the impact on local and state governments is fully understood and considered in the decision,” Gen. Howard said.

The full video of Gen. Howard's Fort Drum Day remarks to the Senate can be [found here](#).

In addition to organizing Fort Drum Day, Senator Ritchie also led an effort, with Senators Joseph Griffo and George D. Maziarz of Western New York, to include \$2 million in additional state budget funding to defend Fort Drum and other military installations from defense cutbacks. Last year, Senator Ritchie was able to access that fund to preserve farmland that borders the post and serves as an essential buffer zone for military training areas, as well as to support health care initiatives in surrounding communities.

A copy of the letter to Gov. Cuomo is attached, and can also be found on Senator Ritchie's website.