



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

Mission: Save Fort Drum

PATTY RITCHIE March 23, 2015

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Senator Ritchie's Weekly Column

American flags, cheerleaders, marching bands, balloons, rally cries and more than 3,000 people passionate about Fort Drum and the 10th Mountain Division. This was the scene Friday night at Jefferson Community College, as people from across our region banded together to send a message to Army leadership as they weigh potential cuts that would be devastating to both our region and the state.

I was proud Friday night, to be one of the thousands who joined in the rally, as well as the “listening session” to voice my support for Fort Drum and the 10th Mountain Division. Growing up in St. Lawrence County, I saw firsthand how the expansion of Fort Drum has transformed our region; bringing to our area new jobs, better health care, improved schools and so many other benefits that extend across all of Central and Northern New York. Now, as we all know, as a result of sequestration, much of that growth is at risk.

During Friday's “listening session,” we heard about how potential cuts would impact our region's quality of life, educational opportunities, health care, jobs and more. But, we also heard about the unique strengths of Fort Drum. We heard about how this community has supported this post's growth, how they've been there for soldiers and their families and how the post's troops and their loved ones have become our friends and neighbors.

Earlier this month, I was honored to host the fourth annual “10th Mountain Division and Fort Drum Day” at the State Capitol. This annual event is a chance for New Yorkers—from all corners of our state—to learn more about Fort Drum and the Army's mission. Featuring a speech in the Senate Chamber by 10th Mountain Division Commanding General, Major General Stephen Townsend, informative displays and more, it was also a chance for the people's representatives—from all corners of the state—to stand up and stand together to voice our support.

However, New York State's support for Fort Drum is more than just speeches and displays. In the 30 years since the 10th Mountain Division was reactivated, our leaders in Albany have been working to grow and support the Fort Drum we see today. Throughout the past three decades, we've invested millions of dollars in housing for troops and their families, expanded schools, developed modern, state-of-the-art health care and improved recreational and entertainment opportunities. And, our support doesn't stop there. Earlier this month, I announced \$500,000 in additional funding to secure additional "buffer areas" around Fort Drum that are critical to preserving the future of the military post. This investment helps to protect farmland and provide the Army with enough open space to conduct the training necessary to ensure our soldiers are the best prepared and equipped of any fighting force in the world.

But it's not just about buildings and land. This community cares about our soldiers and their well-being. With the 10th Mountain Division being the Army's most deployed combat division, we know that many of our troops are returning home with wounds we cannot see. The State Senate has been proud to provide leadership and funding for services like the PFC Joseph Dwyer Peer Support Program for Veterans, located in Watertown and the River Community Wellness Program, based at Alexandria Bay's River Hospital. These programs help to ensure our brave troops are given both a shoulder to lean on and peers to talk with who have shared similar experiences.

The men and women of Fort Drum, of our Army, of the 10th Mountain Division are all part of New York. They are a point of pride for all of us. While the rally and listening session may be over, it's vitally important that we continue to show our support for Fort Drum, as well as 10th Mountain Division soldiers and their families.