



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

Ritchie: \$3 Million in State Budget to Safeguard Bases

PATTY RITCHIE March 31, 2015

| ISSUE: **MILITARY AFFAIRS, MILITARY, TROOPS, VETERANS**

RITCHIE: \$3 MILLION IN STATE BUDGET TO SAFEGUARD BASES

Funding Added by Senate to Protect Fort Drum, Other Military Assets from Cuts

PTSD Funding for Troops and veterans Also Included in Final Plan

State Senator Patty Ritchie announced that the new State Budget includes an additional \$3 million to help safeguard military bases, including Fort Drum, from possible budget and troop cuts.

The funding is in addition to planned roadway improvements and creation of buffer zones to help make the North Country post more attractive to Washington's military planners who are eyeing troop cutbacks linked to the budget sequester law.

"Fort Drum is an important economic engine for the North Country and key part of ensuring the Army's readiness to protect our homeland and fight terrorism abroad," Senator Ritchie said.

"Once again, New York is sending another signal of the community's and our state's commitment to Fort Drum and our nation's military with this additional support for the post and its mission."

The final budget also includes funding to continue services for returning soldiers and veterans who are suffering with PTSD. Programs like the Pfc. Joseph Dwyer Peer-to-Peer program in Watertown and Alexandria Bay's River Hospital River Community Wellness Program have been successful in recent years in helping returning troops cope with PTSD and other combat-related disorders.

It's the fourth year in a row that "military base retention" funding was included in the final budget. This year's funds were added at the request of Senator Ritchie and others, and included in budget bills that passed Monday evening.

In earlier years, the funds were used to help pay for land and easement purchases around the post's perimeter, as well as for investments in health care services to troops and residents of surrounding community, and to back efforts of Fort Drum's community-based support network, led by FDRLO.

Earlier this month, Senator Ritchie tapped the fund to announce a \$500,000 grant for new buffer purchases, adding to the 4,700 acres already set aside to allow the Army to conduct training without worry about encroachment by development.

Fort Drum is Northern New York's most important economic driver with an annual economic impact of more than \$1.3 billion. More than 25,000 troops move through the post each year, and the installation is Upstate New York's biggest single-site employer.

Pentagon planners are studying troop cuts of up to 95 percent at Fort Drum and other facilities across the nation.