



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Joseph A. Griffo

Senator Griffo's remarks celebrating 100 years of the Norfolk Volunteer Fire Department

JOSEPH A. GRIFFO August 6, 2016

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NORFOLK, N.Y. -- The following is the text of the prepared remarks Senator Joseph Griffo gave as the keynote speaker to honor the Norfolk Volunteer Fire Department as it celebrated 100 years of service on Saturday, Aug. 6:

Today, we not only gather to celebrate the centennial of the Norfolk Volunteer Fire Department – but we are also here this afternoon to dedicate this Memorial Park in honor of all the firefighters and first responders who have committed their lives to keeping us safe.

For the past 100 years, the members of the Norfolk Volunteer Fire Department have woken every day ready and willing to answer that call of duty – When that fire bell starts ringing, each of these individuals has dropped everything – left their families, left holiday gatherings or birthday parties – to be there for those of us who may be on the verge of losing everything.

The Norfolk Department was first formed in 1916, after a massive fire killed 4 people, caused more than \$125,000 dollars in damage and nearly wiped out an entire business district.

Since then, they have saved homes, and the most valuable of personal belongings.

They have saved pets that are too scared to flee the flames on their own.

And they have saved lives, of both adults and children – When families have been trapped inside a burning home, your firefighters have selflessly put their lives on the line so that those in danger would survive.

The firefighters of Norfolk have done all of this – and much, much more – for the past 100 years.

Yet, they ask for very little in return for their bravery and sacrifice.

And that's what defines these heroes, these firefighters of Norfolk.

For those who volunteer to join the fire service, they possess something that separates them from the rest of us – an inner strength that drives them to be part of something bigger than themselves – They realize the sobering truth that our survival in times of emergencies will ultimately depend upon the willingness of others to step up and risk their own lives – this they know, and this they accept ...

Because, they know that somebody must do this – They know that someone has to run toward danger when all instincts are warning you to go the other way – They know that somebody must simply act, without fear and without hesitation, because someone – a child, a parent, a neighbor – is depending upon them.

100 years ago, there were 40 members of the Norfolk Fire Department ... Today, there are 75 of you.

Whatever gift God graciously blessed upon those of you who choose to answer this call to service, for that we will be forever grateful, and honored.

In a few weeks, we'll be remembering the terrorist attacks of 9/11 ... a day we lost so many of our first responders. Last year, I participated in a memorial stair climb at the State Office Building to honor the heroes who died while climbing hundreds of stairs as the Twin Towers fell – I put on that heavy yellow firefighter coat and helmet, and slung the oxygen tank over my shoulders. Then I trudged up the stairs. It was only a few floors ... But with that experience, I gained a greater appreciation for the physical challenges our firefighters confront under the worst circumstances anyone could face.

The World Trade Center attacks may seem a world away from Norfolk, New York... But the courage and strength that inspire all of our firefighters are universal, no matter if you're here in the North Country or downstate in New York City – You all share a special bond that makes you the most noble of our citizens.

All of you dedicate yourselves to keeping us safe, fulfilled only by the satisfaction of knowing that you have helped someone – Yet you are also human, and you alone are the ones who are haunted privately by the tragic loss that occasionally occurs, despite doing everything you could – That alone is a measure of fortitude that many of us could never

possess.

During all my years in public service, I have come to know many firefighters across the region. I have seen how much your service means to all of you personally, and I appreciate the struggles you face – That’s why as a State Senator, I have been committed to fighting in Albany on behalf of the fire service.

We’ve expanded the “Move Over Law” for motorists to now include volunteer firefighters and ambulance workers on the side of the road – we’ve passed legislation to increase weekly benefits for disabled volunteer firefighters – and we’ve passed a new law that now requires better, longer-lasting battery-operated smoke detectors in homes.

In the Senate, we’ve pushed for legislation that would give greater insurance coverage for volunteer firefighters who are diagnosed with cancer related to their service – we have budgeted \$250,000 to help volunteer fire departments recruit more men and women to their ranks ... (more)

We passed legislation I proposed that would allow volunteer firefighters and ambulance workers to be eligible for both income and property tax credits, instead of receiving one or the other – and I have called upon the Governor to budget \$100 million in grant funding to help support financially struggling fire departments across the state, especially when it comes to replacing necessary equipment.

Your Department has grown from a single, dry main firefighting system in 1916, and you now operate with 8 major pieces of firefighting apparatus today... And during the past century, your department has faced its own challenges – fire destroyed two of your stations, one in 1918 and then another in 1996. Both were rebuilt.

And finally, I am pleased to have secured the funding several years ago that created this beautiful Memorial Park that we now gather here to dedicate.

As I stated earlier, all of the members of the fire service – in Norfolk and beyond – have proven time and time again that you will do whatever it takes to protect our property and our lives – you do this for all the right reasons, without asking for anything in return, and sometimes you and your families pay a serious price.

Yet, just as much as you are there for us, I believe we have an obligation to be there for you, to always give you our gratitude and respect, and to always do whatever we can to help you do your job – today, tomorrow and for the next 100 years.

Thank you, God bless you, and be safe.

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