



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

Remembering Those Who Serve During “Military Appreciation Month”

SENATOR PATTY RITCHIE May 4, 2018



Senator Ritchie’s Weekly Column

One of the most special days of my year is when the men and women of Fort Drum are able to visit the State Capitol for “10th Mountain Division and Fort Drum Day”. This year, that day was February 6th. I was not only able to visit with soldiers and personally thank them for their heroic service, but I was able to help connect them with many of my colleagues. It was a chance for New York State to see some of the great work they, and the numerous community organizations that support them, do.

Holding this event on February 6th is unusually early compared to years' past. We had to do that though, because Fort Drum's Commanding General Major General Walter Piatt and many other 10th Mountain Division leaders were getting set to deploy to Iraq. They are currently overseas and I wish them a successful and safe tour. I cannot wait to see them back on home soil.

I write this column now, because May is recognized as National military Appreciation Month. It is the time for Americans to celebrate the troops, both active and retired, who have helped protect our freedom.

On Fort Drum, there are 30,000 soldiers and family members. It is the largest Army post north of the Carolinas and east of the Mississippi river. In addition, the post is the engine that drives the North Country economy. Fort Drum is New York State's largest single-site employer. The post employs nearly 4,000 civilians and supports tens of thousands of jobs off-post.

As the Senator who represents Fort Drum, I consider it a great privilege to show as many people as possible, just how critical Fort Drum is to our region, state and nation.

In addition to "10th Mountain Division and Fort Drum Day", I was proud to have helped secure funding in the new state budget to protect the post and its surrounding communities from federal budget cuts, and \$1 million for farmland preservation around the base perimeter.

The new state budget also includes an additional \$645,000 to expand the Joseph P. Dwyer Veteran Services Peer-to-Peer Program. I supported this statewide initiative to help soldiers and veterans suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and other combat-related illnesses.

I also sponsor a number of bills aimed at honoring those who have volunteered to wear the uniform. Those include:

Directing the NYS Department of Motor Vehicles to produce distinctive license plates for recipients of the Bronze or Silver Star (S.757A) and for soldiers of the U.S Army 10th Mountain Division at Fort Drum (S.860B). Another (S.2895A), waives all initial fees for certain veterans custom plates; and

Ceremoniously renaming bridges of the state highway system after New York's 663 recipients of the Medal of Honor.

In addition, these measures, I continue to honor those who have served through my annual "Veterans Hall of Fame" program. Last year, I was fortunate enough to meet and honor 27 local veterans from all branches of the U.S. Armed Services who have fought in history's most dangerous battles and made an impact in their communities as civilians. The 2018 ceremony will be held this summer and if you know someone worthy of recognition, I encourage you to reach out to my office.

During National Military Appreciation Month, I hope you will join me in saying "thank you" to every military member you come across, and let him or her know how much his or her service means to you.