



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Chris Jacobs

## Jacobs Honors Veteran of the Month Stephen Siulc

SENATOR JACOBS October 3, 2019

| ISSUE: **VETERANS RECOGNITION**



(Hamburg, NY) – New York State Senator Chris Jacobs announced today that Town of Orchard Park resident Stephen Siulc has been selected as the 60<sup>th</sup> Senate District Veteran of the Month for October 2019. Siulc, a United States Army veteran who was motivated to volunteer for military service after the terrorist attacks of September 11, was presented with a proclamation from Jacobs marking the occasion at a ceremony at the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 1419 in Hamburg where he currently serves as Post Commander.

“Stephen Siulc bravely served his country in combat in Afghanistan and Iraq and we are indebted to him for his sacrifices in support of our freedom,” said Senator Jacobs. “As a young and energetic leader in Western New York’s veteran community, I am extremely impressed by his vision and commitment to reinvigorate our local veteran’s organizations and the services they provide to our veterans.”

From 2002 – 2006, Siulc served as an Infantryman, E5 Sergeant and Infantry Squad Leader with the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division. He saw significant combat action as a 240 machine gunner in Afghanistan along the Pakistani border. His combat experience extended to his deployment in Iraq where his unit was responsible for security of election sites and external control of the Abu Ghraib prison. After his honorable discharge and completing his education, Siulc started to become active in Post 1419 where his leadership and commitment to his fellow veterans began to be noticed throughout the veteran community. At age 37, he may be one of the youngest to serve as the Commander of the Erie County Council of Veterans of Foreign Wars, and he is using the position to advance mission and service priorities that he believes would attract younger veterans to the ranks of the VFW.

Chief among these priorities is transforming the VFW into an organization better suited to help veterans transition back to civilian life, particularly those suffering from PTSD and related mental health and addiction problems. One very successful example has been Siulc’s involvement in and promotion of the Odyssey Workshops at the CEPA Gallery, a photography program that pairs internationally respected artists with U.S. combat veterans, enabling them to show the public what combat veterans experience after they return home from war. The opportunity to express themselves through photography and other arts such as poetry and music is very therapeutic to many veterans, and Siulc believes the Odyssey program has the potential to serve as a national model.

For decades, legion halls and VFW's were commonly seen as friendly gathering places where veterans could meet over a cold beer and discuss their war experiences. Siulc believes that more family friendly programming however might attract more veterans struggling with addiction who are seeking alternative social outlets. He believes expanding post locations to community college campuses or a downtown location near very supportive police, fire and homeland security professionals could enhance learning and employment opportunities for veterans. As he advocates for some of these new initiatives, he would also like to see veteran's organizations unite and become more effective in advocating for the needs and priorities of veterans.

"My passion for helping my fellow veterans is the driving force behind the very ambitious agenda I have for the VFW," said Siulc. "I am excited and optimistic by the positive support that many of these initiatives have been receiving and I hope to be able to continue pursuing them for many years to come."

"Sergeant Siulc's long history of service to his country and his fellow veterans is a wonderful example of what the 60th Senate District Veteran of the Month award represents," said Jacobs. "He is a very deserving recipient, and I look forward to working with him to help grow active membership in our veteran's groups by providing meaningful and impactful services," the Senator concluded.

Senator Jacobs established the Veteran of the Month program in 2017 to recognize and say thank you to veterans who served honorably and then continued to make a significant impact through their community service or commitment to fellow veterans.