



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pete Harckham

## Harckham Holds Veterans Advisory Council Meeting

PETE HARCKHAM September 25, 2021

| ISSUE: **VETERANS HALL OF FAME, SENATOR HARCKHAM. SD40, VIETNAM WAR VETERANS**



*Yorktown Heights, NY* – New York State Sen. Pete Harckham held a Veterans Advisory Council meeting at the Yorktown VFW Post 8328 on Thursday, Sept. 23, which included a presentation by Judge David F. Everett of the Westchester Supreme Court on veterans courts and an awarding of the New York State Liberty Medal to John Fratangelo, a decorated veteran.

“Our veterans of armed service have specific concerns about care and benefits earned during service, so it is important that I hear from them regularly,” said Harckham. “I appreciate their perspectives on the many issues we discuss, and look forward to continuing collaborating with them to find solutions that will benefit our veterans communities.”

Harckham noted that he was able to include a \$4.5 million allocation for the Joseph P. Dwyer VET 2 VET peer support program in the 2021-2022 State Budget, as well as funding for the new veteran center at Pace University's Pleasantville campus. In addition, Harckham updated attendees at the meeting about the status in the State Legislature of several veterans-related bills discussed and recommended by area veterans at an advisory council meeting the senator held previously.

Among the bills Harckham spoke about designated the pedestrian bridge across the Taconic State Parkway in the town of Yorktown as the "Atomic Veterans Memorial Bridge," which was sponsored by Assemblyman Kevin Byrne; and another bill that replaces the question "are you a veteran" with "have you ever served in the military" in state intake forms to ensure those who have served our country do not prematurely disqualify themselves from receiving veterans' benefits or veteran-specific care. Legislation passed in the State Assembly clarifies the definition of veteran to include career members of the armed forces for purposes of the veterans' alternative tax exemption.

About 30 veterans attended the advisory council meeting, which was the first Harckham has held since the Covid-19 pandemic put public gatherings as such on hiatus last year. Local and veterans officials at the event included Yorktown Supervisor Matt Slater, Yorktown Town Council members Ed Lachterman and Vishnu Patel, former Yorktown Supervisor Ilan Gilbert, former Village of Buchanan trustee Duane Jackson and Karl Rohde, director of the Putnam County Veterans Service Agency. The membership of VFW Post 8328, led by Commander Alex Mandara and Quartermaster Michael O'Connor, was well represented at the meeting too.

A lively discussion at the advisory council meeting began after Judge Everett concluded his presentation. Along with his legal expertise and experience as a jurist in the state's Ninth Judicial District, he served for 30 years in the military, beginning with the New York Army National Guard. As an officer in the U.S. Army Reserve. Everett was deployed to combat zones three times—during the Persian Gulf War, and later to Iraq and Afghanistan between 2005 and 2009. He retired from the U.S. Army Reserve with the rank of colonel.

In 2020, Everett helped establish Veterans Court in Westchester County, which is open to any criminal defendant who has served in the U.S. military. Cases in the County Criminal Court can be transferred to the veterans Court at the request of the defense following an evaluation. If related to Substance Use Disorder, a treatment plan is created for defendants and a volunteer veteran mentor is assigned to them.

Everett noted that the veteran treatment courts are not "veteran punishment courts"—that the treatment programs offered come with strict drug and alcohol monitoring. The courts do not consider any violent crimes, but serve to adjudicate an alternative to incarceration for veterans in need of assistance.

## **John Fratangelo awarded the Liberty Medal**

Last year, John Fratangelo was inducted in the New York State Veterans Hall of Fame, another celebration postponed because of the pandemic. Fratangelo received his Hall of Fame honors at the meeting, and Harckham awarded him the New York State Liberty Medal as well, which is given to individuals who have merited special commendation for exceptional, heroic or humanitarian acts on behalf of their fellow New Yorkers.

A native of the Bronx who has resided in Mahopac for the past 29 years, Fratangelo served in Vietnam as part of the U.S. Army's First Infantry Division. Wounded in combat, he was awarded both the Purple Heart and Silver Star, a medal for valor. Later, he accompanied the body of cousin Anthony, killed in combat, back to the U.S. from Vietnam. Today, he is junior vice commander of the Military Order of the Purple Heart, Chapter 21 of Putnam / Westchester.

Over 50 years ago, John began writing stories about his wartime experiences, and with the encouragement of his wife Judy and local writers groups, completed his book about the war, entitled *The Last Goodbye*, and published it last year.

“Your story is remarkable, John—and your service to our country has been exemplary,” said Harckham in presenting the Liberty Medal to Fratangelo. “Your continuing concern for your fellow warriors illustrates the simple rule of a good soldier: no one gets left behind. You are a man of high principles. Simply, the world is a better place because of you.”