



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Senator O'Mara's weekly column 'From the Capitol' -- for the week of November 11, 2024 -- 'Remembering our veterans now, and always'

THOMAS F. O'MARA November 12, 2024

| ISSUE: **VETERANS DAY**



Senator O'Mara offers his weekly perspective on many of the key challenges and issues facing the Legislature.

Veterans Day, more than anything else, draws us to those monuments and memorials in our midst that still, and we hope will always, rise up to honor and remember those who have served and sacrificed.

Senator O'Mara offers his weekly perspective on many of the key challenges and issues facing the Legislature, as well as on legislative actions, local initiatives, state programs and policies, and more. Stop back every Monday for Senator O'Mara's latest column...

This week, **"Remembering our veterans now, and always"**

It's best to start this column with a memory. In the end, that's what this week is all about: remembering.

With that in mind, I'll recall these words from former President Ronald Reagan: "Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same."

Fought for. Protected. Handed on. Travel through this region's individual communities and it's striking to reflect on the common landmarks that stand equally tall as reminders of the guiding principles and the underlying and unifying strengths of our nation: town and village halls, county courthouses, churches, elementary schools, community parks, local public libraries. These fundamental American places still echo the very reasons for our nation's founding and her endurance as the world's great democracy.

Consequently, we can never forget the monuments and memorials that America's communities have built to honor our veterans. Indeed, there may be no more powerful or poignant landmarks anywhere, and on Veterans Day we will gather in many of these places to remember.

We'll be observing this year's Veterans Day while American troops are still bravely engaged in protecting freedom and democracy here at home and across the globe. It will be observed at a time when the world's stage remains embroiled in uncertainty and instability.

We still stand proud in local ceremonies around the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions to honor the sacrifices and the victories of our soldiers -- past, present, and future. In so doing, we reaffirm our pride in this nation's armed forces and, of course, we turn our thoughts and prayers to those young soldiers we've lost.

Since the tragic unfolding of Sept. 11, 2001, this generation has realized and continues to realize, all too painfully, that our freedom here at home can be threatened at any moment. We realize, as well, that our troops always stand ready to protect it again and again. The freedoms we cherish have been hard-won by the soldiers of previous generations and by those of this generation who have continued to serve. They are true American heroes, and we are grateful to every one of them.

Sacrifice is the truth that we remember and honor on Veterans Day, especially today when sacrifice can too often seem an on-the-decline virtue in American life.

To always honor our veterans is the reason that, in 2005, the New York State Senate established a Veterans Hall of Fame. We inducted our class of 2024 earlier this year and I was proud to pay tribute to the service of Merle John Tobias, a native of Hornell, former resident of Steuben and Allegany counties, and employee of the Bath VA Medical Center. I also had the opportunity to honor John during a local ceremony this summer at the Allegany County Fair. John served in the United States Army during the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and throughout the Persian Gulf War.

One other way that New York government seeks to constantly honor military service has been through the development of new laws and the administration of programs and services that seek to address the many challenges facing today's veterans in areas such as health care, employment, and education. The state Division of Veterans' Affairs (www.veterans.ny.gov) was established in 1945 to assist veterans, members of the armed forces and their families. Since then, the division -- in concert with its offices in counties locally and statewide -- has strongly advocated for New York's veterans and veterans' issues at the local, state, and national levels. It is a proud history of service.

But Veterans Day, more than anything else, draws us to those monuments and memorials in our midst that still, and we hope will always, rise up to honor and remember those who have served and sacrificed.

To all those who have served or are serving at this moment, Thank You.

May God Bless America.

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