



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Lee M. Zeldin

Senator Lee M. Zeldin Announces Senate Passage of Legislation to Limit Protests at Military Funerals

LEE M. ZELDIN March 14, 2011

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“The Specialist Thomas Wilwerth Military Dignity Act”

Albany, NY- Just over 48 hours after Senator Lee Zeldin (R, C, I- Shirley) announced the introduction of legislation to ban protests at Military Funerals, ***“The Specialist Thomas Wilwerth Military Dignity Act”*** passed the full Senate.

This act will prohibit protests within 2,500 feet of military services, funerals, and processions of deceased service members unless the protest organizers post a bond to the local municipality to defray the increased security costs associated with demonstrations that occur closer to these funeral activities. In no case would protesters be permitted within 500 feet. The protestors will also have to apply for a permit with the New York Division of Military and Naval Affairs.

The Act will be named for Specialist Thomas Wilwerth, an Iraq War Veteran who lost his life in combat in 2006. Specialist Wilwerth and Senator Zeldin both graduated from William Floyd High School in Mastic Beach, New York.

“This past Saturday, I was proud to announce this legislation in my district. I am even prouder that this legislation will be named after one of our hometown heroes, Specialist Thomas Wilwerth. Today we sent an important message to current and future Gold Star families that we are fighting to protect the dignity, respect and honor that their fallen military veteran deserves,” said Senator Zeldin.

Senator Zeldin is currently a Captain in the U.S. Army Reserves. He was a paratrooper, prosecutor and magistrate with the 82nd Airborne Division and XVIII Airborne Corps. He was also deployed to Iraq in the summer of 2006 with an infantry battalion of fellow paratroopers from the 82nd Airborne Division.

Senate Majority Leader Dean G. Skelos said, “Senator Zeldin is keeping his commitment to get this legislation done, to protect the right of military families to bury their loved ones in peace. This bill protects that right while also protecting free speech rights. The bill would help ensure order, honor and discretion at these emotional events.”

“This legislation takes into consideration the free speech rights of those who choose to protest military funerals with hateful rhetoric and tactics. We must balance that right with the need to protect our gold star families and allow them to peacefully mourn the loss of their military hero and loved one. With its passage today, I call upon the State Assembly to take action on this bill so we can deliver it to Governor Cuomo for his signature,” concluded Senator Zeldin.

The bill is sponsored in the New York State Assembly by Assemblyman Dean Murray (R,C-East Patchogue).