



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Martin J. Golden

Senator Golden Joins Senate Colleagues in Passing Legislation to Limit Protests at Military Funerals

MARTIN J. GOLDEN March 15, 2011

“The Specialist Thomas Wilwerth Military Dignity Act”

State Senator Martin J. Golden (R-C-I, Brooklyn), a member of the New York State Senate Committee on Homeland Security, Military and Veteran Affairs, joined his colleagues in the New York State Senate yesterday afternoon in passing legislation (S.3901), sponsored by Senator Lee Zeldin (R,C,I- Shirley), that would limit protests at military funerals. Called “The Specialist Thomas Wilwerth Military Dignity Act,” the proposed law is named for an Iraq War Veteran who lost his life in combat in 2006.

The bill prohibits 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. Protestors would also not be permitted within 500 feet of funeral activities and would have to apply for a permit with the New York State Division of Veterans' Affairs under this measure.

Senator Marty Golden stated, “Today we are sending 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. This legislation protects the right of military families to bury their loved ones in peace, and at the same time, protects free speech rights. 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.”

Massachusetts has a similar law that enforces a buffer zone around funerals to prevent disruptions by protestors.

“I would like to issue a real challenge to the people who want to protest the funerals of our fallen heroes. Our soldiers fight at home and abroad for our freedoms. If the protestors can give me one reason why they should be protesting instead of kissing and thanking our heroes, then I’ll listen,” said Terry Wilwerth, Father of Specialist Thomas Wilwerth.

The bill has been sent to the Assembly where it is sponsored by Assemblyman Dean Murray (R,C- East Patchogue).