



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

## Senator O'Mara's weekly column "From the Capitol..."--for the week of Memorial Day 2011

THOMAS F. O'MARA May 30, 2011

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It's going to be a pivotal year in New York State government. That's one thing most Albany observers already agree on. The challenges have never been greater. Throughout 2011, Senator O'Mara will offer his weekly perspective on many of the key issues, as well as on legislative actions, local initiatives, state programs and policies, and so much more. Stop back every Monday for Senator O'Mara's latest column "From the Capitol..."

This week, "[Reminders, everywhere, of veterans](#)"

**Read column below, including links to referenced articles:**

This year's observance of the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the start of the American Civil War in 1861 will inspire many historical reminiscences in the months ahead of famous battlefields, soldiers, political leaders and so much more. Just last week we saw local Red Cross chapters and nearly 100 area middle school students mark the anniversary with [a day of living history at the Bath VA Medical Center](#).

As part of the state Senate's long-standing effort to recognize distinguished women from throughout New York State's history, I recently sponsored an early induction into the Senate's version of a New York State Women's Hall of Fame. That's because one of next year's inductees will be Susan E. Hall, who was raised in the Tompkins County town of Ulysses and is recognized as one of the first women from New York State to be accepted as a nurse in the Civil War. She served in field hospitals on numerous Civil War battlefields, including Bull Run and Gettysburg. Historians note that Civil War field nurses not only tended wounded and dying soldiers and cared for the many physical needs of their patients, but played an equally important emotional and spiritual role as well. Susan Hall was brought to my attention by the Tompkins Cortland Community College (TC3) Civil War Nurses Fund Committee and the Tompkins County Civil War Sesquicentennial Commemoration. It's fantastic local history and now was the time to honor it. Though little known to the world at large, Susan E. Hall is surely a worthy reminder of the selflessness, compassion and bravery that distinguish all of New York's veterans. You can [read more about her on my Senate website](#).

So it's fitting to recall this and many other Civil War stories this Memorial Day, a day whose beginnings, after all, are traced to the post-Civil War practice, once known as Decoration Day, to place flowers and otherwise decorate the graves of Union and Confederate soldiers.

Because first, and always, Memorial Day is about remembering our soldiers, and there can never be enough occasions remindful of those serving in America's military. Fortunately, there's no shortage.

A few weeks ago, for example, the United States Postal Service unveiled its new Purple Heart Forever USA postage stamp. [I marked that occasion by noting that the effort to designate the stamp began in earnest in New York State a decade ago](#). The new Purple Heart Forever stamp gives us another opportunity to honor our servicemen and servicewomen and all they represent.

In a few weeks, on Flag Day, I'll pay tribute to a prominent local veteran as one of the newest members of the state Senate's [online Veterans Hall of Fame](#). Three local veterans – William Kastner, Frank C. "Fitz" Pesesky, and Robert Laskaris – are currently part of the Hall.

So there are always reminders, everywhere, everyday, and that's as it should be. But never more so than on Memorial Day. We gather in cemeteries, city parks, town squares, village greens and around our local veterans memorials to reflect on the greatness of a nation built on the sacrifices of her soldiers and to pay our respects to those soldiers who still today serve the undying dreams of our homeland: freedom and peace, compassion and decency, and democracy.

That never changes, and it's a great source of national strength that we carry it on.