



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

## **Senator Ritchie Named to Nationwide Veterans Panel**

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### **Group Will Explore Ways to Improve Services, Outreach to Those Who Served**

State Senator Patty Ritchie has been picked to be part of a nationwide group looking at ways to improve services and outreach to veterans and active members of America's military.

The Council of State Governments "Task Force on Military and Veterans Affairs" includes legislators and elected state leaders from across the country. The panel is charged with identifying key veterans' issues and best-practices that are already in use in various states. The group's findings will be used to help draft legislative proposals in New York and other states to aid veterans.

"As the State Senator who represents the largest military post in the Northeast, and tens of thousands of veterans who served from World War II to the continuing battles against terrorism, I've given top priority to the needs of veterans and active duty members of our military," said Senator Ritchie, whose district includes Fort Drum, home to the Army's 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division.

"Bringing together ideas and people from across the country who are similarly committed to our veterans and military will help ensure that we are doing all we can to recognize and support those who have served," Senator Ritchie said.

In addition to Fort Drum, and its 18,000 soldiers and 20,000 family members, Senator Ritchie's District also includes nearly 3,000 retirees from all military branches, and New York is home to nearly 1 million veterans.

At the State Capitol and in the community, Senator Ritchie has been a leader on veterans' and military issues:

- This year, she sponsored a new law to help disabled veterans find employment by requiring state agencies to seek out veteran-owned businesses for government contracts;

- She sponsored New York's new "Hire-a-Vet" tax credit that rewards employers with tax credits when they employ recently returning veterans;
- For three years, she has secured special budget funding for treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) for homecoming North Country soldiers and veterans. The program is administered by River Hospital in Alexandria Bay;
- She secured critical funding to help defend Fort Drum from Pentagon budget cuts,
- She annually sponsors Fort Drum Day at the State Capitol in Albany to recognize the post, its officers and soldiers for their service and to help raise awareness of the key role Fort Drum plays in the region's economy.

"These are some of the issues and ideas I will be bringing to the table, and I'm eager to hear those of other legislators and state representatives that we can put to work to help our soldiers at Fort Drum, and everyone who has served," Senator Ritchie said.

The Task Force is supposed to make its initial report later this summer. The Council on State Governments is a non-partisan group comprising members of state legislatures, as well as representatives of the executive and judicial branches of all 50 states, formed to exchange ideas and help form effective policies.