



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Andrea Stewart-Cousins

## Senator Stewart-Cousins Recognizes the Veteran Association of the 71st Regiment of the NY Nat'l Guard

ANDREA STEWART-COUSINS May 24, 2016

| ISSUE: **VETERANS**

**Hastings, NY** - With Memorial Day approaching, State Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins joined the Veteran Association of the 71st Regiment National Guard of New York during their annual ceremony held in Hastings-on-Hudson on Saturday May 21st, recognizing their commitment to service. The theme of this year's memorial was the Aleutian Islands Campaign that has been known as the "Forgotten Battle" of World War II and in which a unit from the 71st Regiment fought. The 71st Regiment was formed on October 23, 1850 in New York City.

"The 71st has a long history of serving our great nation whenever and wherever the need has arisen," said Senator Stewart-Cousins. "New York State has nearly one million veterans. We must value their commitment and honor them for their service. Like the Aleutian Islands Campaign, the sacrifices made by many to protect a nation are still not recognized enough in the pages of our history."

The 71st Regiment has a storied history and has fought valiantly in numerous wars throughout history. The 71st regiment volunteered during the Spanish American War and was called into service three times during the Civil War. The Aleutian Islands Campaign took place from June 1942 until August 1943 during World War II where U.S. troops fought to

remove Japanese garrisons established on a pair of U.S. owned islands west of Alaska.

Senator Stewart-Cousins concluded, “The 71st Regiment and all of our veterans have given America and New York State much to be grateful for. Our state government has a responsibility to ensure that when veterans return to civilian life that they have the tools to maintain a healthy life. We must continue to improve veterans’ services and connect veterans to opportunities they deserve and need. We won’t stop fighting for those who have fought for us.”

Under the Leadership of Senator Stewart-Cousins, the Senate Democratic Conference has put forth a strong package of bills to improve the lives of veterans in New York that will:

**Help Survivors of Military Sexual Trauma (MST):** Statistically, women in the military are twice as likely to be sexually assaulted. To address this troubling fact, Senator Stewart-Cousins has sponsored legislation that would direct the State’s Division of Veteran Affairs, as well as local veterans’ service agencies, to plan and develop assistance programs and benefits for veterans who experienced MST.

In addition to Senate Democratic Leader Stewart-Cousins’ bill, this legislation that will require the Commissioner of the Office of Mental Health and the Division of Veterans Affairs to disseminate information to veterans on where they can seek treatment and counseling for Military Sexual Trauma. This bill will help veterans access vital resources to overcome MST as they transition back into civilian life.

**Facilitate Course Credits for Veterans:** Currently, 26 states have recently passed legislation directing state universities to award academic credit to veterans based on military training and education. As New York State should ensure veterans receive credit for the skills they learned during their service, legislation has been sponsored that would require institutions

within the state university system to award up to 6 credits per semester and 60 credits total to full-time undergraduate veterans based on military training and education to apply toward a degree requirement or program of study.

**Create a Veterans Jobs Bank Website:** Under this bill, the Division of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Labor would be required to develop an interactive veterans jobs website featuring job openings of interest to veterans and military families.

**Remove Barriers for Veterans' Housing Tax Exemptions:** Currently, veterans are not allowed to deduct compensation payments for injuries received in the line of duty from their income when applying for the senior citizen property tax exemption. To correct this flaw, legislation has been introduced that will enable veterans to receive this common sense tax exemption.

**Help LGBT Veterans Access State Benefits:** Due to the "Don't Ask/Don't Tell" policy, many LGBT veterans received an other than honorable discharge from the armed forces and are currently denied access to over 50 state benefit, despite an end to the flawed policy. To assist these veterans, who did nothing wrong, legislation has been introduced that will simplify the process to correct discharge records for LGBT veterans were discharged under the past "Don't Ask/Don't Tell" policy so they can now receive the New York State benefits they have earned.

**Improve Access for Mental Health Support:** Due to their unique experiences, many veterans are in need of mental health services, and often suicide prevention support, as they transition back into civilian life. To ensure New York State provides the very best possible support and care for veterans, legislation has been sponsored that will create a task force to examine, evaluate and determine how to improve mental health and suicide prevention and provide a report and recommendations.