



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

Honoring Those Who Serve

SENATOR PATTY RITCHIE May 22, 2019

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Senator Ritchie's Weekly Column

From the up-close look at the latest in military technology to the incredibly inspiring speech from new 10th Mountain Division and Fort Drum Commander Major General Brian Mennes, I could not have been happier with the impact my eighth annual '10th Mountain Division and Fort Drum Day' at the State Capitol had on my colleagues.

I host this event each year to allow those in Albany to not only recognize the service and sacrifice of our 10th Mountain Division soldiers, but to also show them the positive impact

Fort Drum has on our regional and state economy and the critical role it plays in our national defense. In addition, for the very first time, we were able to get the Fort Drum band to make the trip for a special performance.

For many of my colleagues, this event is the only chance they will have to make a personal connection—and shake the hands—of the heroic men and women who bravely and proudly defend our freedom.

The day again featured informative, interactive displays by 10th Mountain Division troops in an effort to educate lawmakers and visitors to the Capitol on the post's mission, as well as to highlight the latest in equipment they are using out in the field. In addition, community groups that provide services to support Fort Drum soldiers and their families were also on hand to share information on the work they are doing to strengthen the partnership between the area's military and civilian communities.

This year, the month of May is recognized as national "Military Appreciation Month"—a time for the American people to celebrate all military members, both active and retired, who have helped protect our freedom.

With more than 30,000 soldiers and family members, Fort Drum is a small city. It is the largest Army post north of the Carolinas and east of the Mississippi river. In addition, the post is the engine that drives the North Country economy. Fort Drum is New York State's largest single-site employer. It employs roughly 4,000 civilians and supports tens of thousands of jobs off-post.

As the Senator who represents Fort Drum, I consider it a great privilege to have the 10th Mountain Division in our backyard protecting us and as such, I work hard to ensure we are doing all we can to return the favor to our brave men and women in uniform.

In the most recent state budget, I was able to advocate for the full restoration of the Joseph P. Dwyer Veteran Services Peer-to-Peer Program, which had been eliminated in the first Executive Budget Proposal. This initiative is designed to help soldiers and veterans suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and other combat-related illnesses.

On the legislative side, I also sponsor a number of bills aimed at honoring those who have volunteered to wear the uniform. Those include:

- Directing the NYS Department of Motor Vehicles to produce distinctive license plates for recipients of the Bronze or Silver Star (S.757A) and for soldiers of the U.S Army 10th Mountain Division at Fort Drum (S.860B). Another (S.2895A), waives all initial fees for certain veterans custom plates; and
- Ceremoniously renaming bridges of the state highway system after New York's 663 recipients of the Medal of Honor.

During National Military Appreciation Month, I hope you will join me in saying "thank you" to every military member you come across, and let him or her know how much his or her service means to you.