ECSU remembers Veterans Day event features top official

By MICHAEL ROULEAU

WILLIMANTIC — Sean M. Connolly, commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs, was the keynote speaker at Eastern Connecticut State University’s annual Veterans Day ceremony Wednesday.

“Today we pay homage to the patriots of all our wars,” said Connolly, “including peacetime veterans, Cold War veterans and those of all our conflicts.”

Connolly also mentioned that 2015 is the 70-year anniversary of the conclusion of World War II, in which Connecticut lost more than 4,000 of its citizens and the 40-year anniversary of the Vietnam War, in which Connecticut lost more than 600 of its citizens.

“We should not glorify the work that our brave men and women in the armed forces perform in battle, we need to hold up their bravery and sacrifice as a symbol of America’s strength,” said Eastern President Elsa Nunez.

While Connolly is not an Eastern graduate, he did take summer classes at Eastern years ago, and last week returned to campus to visit the VETS Center (Veterans Education and Transition Services).

“You can see the fine talent and deep potential our veterans bring to the table,” he said, commenting on veterans’ work ethic and success in the college setting.

There are more than 600 students, faculty and staff who are veterans, active duty or military reserve members at Eastern.

With a veterans center serving this population, U.S. News and World Report has ranked Eastern as the ninth best public institution in the North for veterans.

As commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs, Connolly is tasked with “serving those who have served.”

While Connecticut’s more than 200,000 veterans are experiencing a surge in support services compared to years and generations past, they still face many mental, physical, fiscal and employment challenges, according to Connolly.

He urged the crowd to thank a veteran, “not just today, but every day,” as they are the reason the United States is the longest enduring democracy in the world.

The ceremony also featured remarks from Eastern’s Kenneth Reines, vice president for student affairs; student Kevin Lacy, a machinist in the Navy; Tony M. Murtucci, Air Force veteran and coordinator of the VETS Center; and the Rev. Laurence LaPointe.

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Sean M. Connolly, state veterans affairs chief