

Southbury First Selectman Tim O'Neil's speech at the Southbury Volunteer Fire Department Annual Dinner for the Installation of Officers and New Members - July 18, 2026

Speech to Volunteer Firefighters

Good evening, everyone.

I just wanted to say that I have **immense respect and gratitude** for the incredible work that each of you does as volunteer firefighters. It is an **honor to have this opportunity to express my heartfelt appreciation** for your dedication, courage, and selflessness.

Every day, you all put on your uniforms, ready to face the **unpredictable challenges** that come your way. You answer the call when others flee, and that is a **profound testament to your character**. The **sacrifices you make**—whether it's time away from family, friends, or even your own safety—**do not go unnoticed**, and they are deeply appreciated by everyone in this community.

I must admit, there are days when I look at what you all do and am filled with awe. I'm not certain I could ever **muster the bravery to face a raging fire**, to enter a **burning building**, or to **rescue someone** from peril. The **physical and emotional demands** of your role are beyond what most can fathom. **It takes an extraordinary person to serve as a volunteer firefighter—someone who is willing to place the lives of others above their own.**

You are not just firefighters; you are community heroes. You represent the best of us. You forge bonds of brotherhood and sisterhood, rely on each other's strengths, and assure one another in times of fear and uncertainty. The **teamwork you demonstrate when you answer a call is something that every citizen should aspire to**—working with precision, courage, and commitment.

Your presence in our community provides such a vital sense of security to all of us. You are the **backbone of our response to emergencies**, and we are all **grateful for your unwavering commitment**. Listening to (I have a radio in the office) the mass casualty Bus accident was inspiring! Everyone understood exactly what needed to be done in a time of emotional stress and everything worked out to perfection.

Today, **I want to say thank you**—not just for the times you've responded to alarms, but for the countless hours spent **training, preparing, and supporting one another and the community**. Know that your **service makes a difference**, and that you have the **appreciation of not only your fellow firefighters but the entire town**.

As **First Selectman**, I promise to continue to **seek ways to support you**, whether it's advocating for **better resources, fostering training opportunities, or encouraging young people to see the importance of volunteerism**. **I want you to know that what you do matters, and it makes our community a safer place to live.**

I urge each of you to remember what you do is **not just a job—it's a calling**. It's a **commitment to humanity**. **It's a promise that when there is danger, you will be there**. **Each time you answer the call, know that the gratitude of this community is behind you, supporting you and standing with you.**

Thank you for your service, your sacrifice, and your courage.

Thank you.