

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS

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April 20, 2009
Start: 01:15 pm
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HELD AT: Hearing Room
 250 Broadway, 16th Floor

B E F O R E: JAMES SANDERS, JR.
 Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:
 James Sanders, Jr.
 Michael C. Nelson
 Tony Avella
 Lewis A. Fidler
 Letitia James

A P P E A R A N C E S

Rachel Natelson
Director of Veterans and Service Members Project
Urban Justice Center

Carol Gardener
Executive Director
Fitzgerald House

Peter Bronson
Veterans for Peace

Jose Cabrera
US Marine

Oronde Takuma
Black Veterans for Social Justice

Dan Rossi
Disabled Veteran

Howard Dalton
Disabled Veteran

Anuradha Bhagwati
Director
Service Women's Action Network

Martin Diaz
Disabled Veteran

Joseph Bellow
Disabled Veteran

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2 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: The meeting
3 of the Veterans Committee of the City Council will
4 now come to order. It's certainly good to be
5 here, in spite of the rainy day, in spite of all
6 of the things. Then again, we veterans have seen
7 a little rain before in our journey, and we'll see
8 more. I was reflecting on my own return and how
9 it took me at least three months before I was
10 really ready to be around people. That when a car
11 backfired, or anything like that, I reacted
12 different than others. When I got into arguments
13 on the street, I had to leave them alone. I had
14 to end that stuff quickly because I looked at it
15 differently. We no longer looked at silly
16 arguments the same way. I understood that that
17 stuff could really lead. It took me three months
18 to recover and I did not see war. I am a post-
19 Vietnam era Marine Corps grunt, infantry for those
20 who need to know. Although we were trained for
21 Vietnam, thank God I didn't have to go. I always
22 am amazed at a couple of things. I am amazed at
23 the people furthest away from war whose children
24 will never go and who made sure that they will
25 never go are the ones who are most eager to go to

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2 war. They're the most eager to talk about how we
3 should fight. I'm always amazed at that. It
4 seems to me that those who have been in and the
5 closer you get to war, the more peaceful you
6 become; the more that you really just want to live
7 in peace. Now most veterans, of course, return
8 well. The vast majority of veterans will return
9 well and reintegrate themselves into society with
10 a minimum of aid. We really don't hear from them
11 much again, not as veterans. Another portion of
12 us, sadly, have trouble coming home. We have
13 trouble making the transition back. We have
14 trouble, whether this trouble is caused by the
15 IEDs, the improvised explosive devices or any of
16 these other things, or troubles caused by things
17 we've seen or been through, they are just
18 troubles. Our families have taken a hit while
19 we've been gone. The relationships have become
20 rocky. The problems have multiplied. We have
21 trouble that way. Of course, housing is always a
22 problem. Coming home has been interesting where
23 the prices have skyrocketed. The monies that are
24 given to a person, the pay that is given to a
25 person in the military is never an adequate

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2 amount, especially for what they're doing. Yet
3 the prices on rent and food and everything
4 skyrocket. So that's always a problem when we
5 come back. Then I'm always interested in seeing
6 what I call the sudden love of folk where, at
7 least in this conflict, these recent conflicts,
8 you're greeted back warmly and then you're
9 promptly forgotten. Well we don't get a
10 tickertape parade, but at least we don't get eggs
11 thrown at us. At least we don't get called names
12 in the street but it seems that people just want
13 us to go away. If this conflict is going to be
14 like just about any other conflict, then we will
15 see an overwhelming amount of people on the
16 street. The homeless population becomes more and
17 more veteran. What a sad statement of our
18 country. Some of these are absolute heroes who
19 have done some magnificent things and yet are
20 sleeping on cardboard boxes. We have to do
21 something about that and in our small way; this
22 committee will do something about these things.
23 We indeed believe in thinking globally, but acting
24 locally. New York City will attempt to address
25 these issues by the grace of God and hard work.

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2 We will attempt to grapple with things that the
3 country, as a whole, has yet to grapple with. I
4 am aided by some of the most able people that the
5 government has to offer, and at the end of this
6 hearing I will name some of their names. But I'm
7 aided even more, I'm aided by the veteran
8 community, I'm aided by people who take this
9 personal, people who understand that if left to
10 its own devices, these vets are on their own.
11 They're solely, simply out there on their own, and
12 we can't have that happen. So I need your help.
13 I encourage you, I implore you, I beseech you, and
14 all the rest of that good stuff. I'm really going
15 to need your help in this journey. Let's imagine
16 for a moment that I really mean well. Let's
17 imagine that this task is monumental; that this
18 task is larger than I even anticipate. Perhaps
19 it's good that I'm a little bit naïve on how large
20 the task is. If I was aware maybe I'd run the
21 other way. But then again, you have to find a
22 true believer if you want to get some stuff done;
23 somebody who just simply doesn't understand why we
24 can't have it yesterday. That of course is the
25 military way and certainly the Marine Corps way

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2 where we brag that the difficult is done immediate
3 and the impossible takes just a little longer. So
4 that's the spirit that we're going into this. I
5 encourage you to join with us. With that in mind,
6 we have some people who are no strangers to going
7 uphill and still winning and making things work.
8 Of course I'm speaking about my colleague from
9 Queens, Council Member Tony Avella, who is a
10 fighter for what he believes in, in no small way.
11 Say what we wish about Tony, he will be heard.
12 And more often than not, the man makes a lot of
13 sense, so listen to him. But we are also joined
14 by a fighter from Brooklyn who has made her name
15 throughout the five boroughs. When some people
16 made the mistake of situating something in her
17 area and didn't get her onboard, boy I bet you
18 they rue the day. I bet you if they could do it
19 again, they'd spend a little bit more time. I
20 don't know if it would do anything, but I sure
21 know they'd spend more time. I'm talking about
22 Council Member Tish James of Brooklyn, who is
23 known throughout this city for fighting, not
24 simply things in her district, but for things she
25 believe are for the good of the city. We have

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2 other people on this committee and we have come up
3 with a very worthy committee for what some people
4 may say is an impossible task. If you ever have
5 an impossible task, then you want fighters like
6 this. Good afternoon and thank you all for your
7 attendance here today for the Veteran Committee
8 hearing focusing on the needs and concerns of New
9 York City veterans. As many of you know, I am
10 James Sanders, Jr.; the new chair of the Veterans
11 Committee. I would like to say how proud I am
12 today to be holding my first hearing as a
13 chairperson of this committee. I would like to
14 acknowledge and thank my co-members of the
15 committee, Council Members Avella, Fidler, James
16 and Nelson. I know they have been participating
17 on this committee since its inception and I look
18 forward to working with my colleagues and most
19 importantly with you to assist in the city's
20 efforts to serve our veterans community. As you
21 know, we have nearly 300,000 veterans living in
22 our city and thousands more returning from
23 overseas. I am proud to say that I am one of them
24 having served in the United States Marine Corps,
25 Uncle Sam's misguided children. The needs of

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2 these fine New Yorkers vary according to their
3 age, their experience in the service and the
4 access they have to services and support networks.
5 He wears his hat too, I like that. We have aging
6 veterans who have served in World War II and we
7 have those who are just returning home to us after
8 their difficult and trying tours in Iraq and
9 Afghanistan. It is estimated that there are
10 nearly 45,000 female veterans in the city.

11 Outstanding. As we know from a previous hearing
12 held in the fall, highlighting concern for females
13 in the military, their needs present a range of
14 challenges for the government and the service
15 providers. We have a long way to go to adequately
16 make sure that female veterans are getting the
17 support they need. But despite these challenges,
18 I am convinced that our communities can meet the
19 challenges. We have the ability, the talent, the
20 resources and the know-how to come forward and
21 ensure that no one is going without proper care in
22 our city, without a roof over a head or without
23 the access to resources that he or she needs to
24 adjust to a fulfilling and prosperous life. I add
25 in there that I know this well as a disabled

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2 veteran it's important for me to ensure that my
3 fellow veterans reengage with society and bring
4 the talent that they have, this incredible talent
5 that we have, back to the process. Thank you
6 again for participating. Before we begin, I want
7 to draw your attention to Brooklyn's finest with
8 his New York City's finest hat. Of course I'm
9 talking about our Council Member Nelson, who has
10 not only served in service, but has served our
11 City Council well coming out of Brooklyn. If you
12 ever need some help in anything, a finer person
13 would be hard to find. Would you be kind enough
14 to call our first speaker?

15 FEMALE VOICE: Rachel Natelson and
16 Carol Gardner?

17 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: In the order
18 that you were called up, if you would be kind
19 enough to begin your testimony.

20 RACHEL NATELSON: Good afternoon.
21 My name is Rachel Natelson and I'm the director of
22 the Veterans and Service Members Project at the
23 Urban Justice Center. The project provides free
24 legal services for past and present military
25 personnel in a variety of civil matters, in

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2 addition to conducting research and policy
3 advocacy on behalf of this population. Home to
4 over a million veterans, New York State contains
5 the fourth largest veteran population in the
6 country, with 35% of this cohort residing here in
7 the five boroughs. In fact, at 350,000 and
8 growing, the number of veterans in New York City
9 alone surpasses the respective statewide veteran
10 populations in 28 states. These numbers translate
11 into a web of needs that threatens to grow ever
12 more tangled in the absence of appropriate
13 resources. Veterans residing in or returning to
14 the city already face a host of concerns. An
15 inefficient disability benefit system, a family
16 court system that fails to accommodate the demands
17 of deployment, a criminal justice insensitive to
18 the warrior mindset and a declining job market in
19 which employers often view military service as a
20 liability instead of an asset. In spite of the
21 magnitude of these needs, not nearly enough
22 services are in place to accommodate them.
23 Veteran Services Officers, who have historically
24 offered representation to those seeking VA
25 benefits, face staggering caseloads, undermining

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2 their ability to analyze claims and obtain and
3 submit evidence for every case. At the same time,
4 the city's VA Benefits office remains one of the
5 most troubled in the country, with recent
6 investigations revealing a pattern of document
7 destruction. Long notorious for its delays in
8 handling claims, this office routinely takes over
9 a year to process in initial applications.

10 Meanwhile veterans and active duty personnel are
11 also in need of assistance in asserting their
12 rights in civilian matters ranging from family
13 relations to employment and voting. New York's
14 Administration for Children Services for example
15 currently offers no policy to accommodate deployed
16 parents with children in foster care, in spite of
17 having devised a comparable procedure for
18 incarcerated parents. Instead, the agency has
19 deemed deployed soldiers absent parents, denying
20 them the right to participate in placement
21 decisions. At the same time, military attorneys
22 are often unfamiliar with state-specific family
23 law and thus unable to provide meaningful
24 representation. Given the disconnect between
25 state family law and military family policy,

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2 service members often suffer double injury as
3 family courts disregard the care plans they devise
4 through the military and the military overlooks
5 the implications of state court orders. A client,
6 for example, was bewildered to learn that the
7 military power of attorney he had assigned to
8 appoint his mother guardian of children during his
9 deployment carried no weight with the local family
10 court judge who ultimately placed his children in
11 foster care. At the same time, the military
12 continued to deduct family support money from his
13 salary in spite of the fact that his children were
14 no longer in their mother's care. As the divorce
15 rate among enlisted personnel continues to rise,
16 service members have also begun to encounter
17 difficulties in seeking and maintaining custody of
18 their children. Even ordinarily straightforward
19 matters like uncontested divorce, tend to be
20 complicated by issues of service and availability
21 for court proceedings. Meanwhile, a few family law
22 practitioners are sufficiently versed in the
23 Service Members Civil Relief Act and comparable
24 protections to assist military personnel with such
25 matters. In spite of laws prohibiting

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2 discrimination against service members in housing
3 and hiring, landlords and employers are often wary
4 of accommodating active duty personnel due to
5 their itinerate lifestyle. Veterans, meanwhile,
6 have expressed concern that employers shrink from
7 hiring them for fear of their potential
8 psychological problems. Service-related mental
9 illness also yields repercussions within the
10 criminal justice system. Without access to
11 treatment, psychologically scarred veterans are
12 increasingly likely to engage in conduct harmful
13 to themselves and others. The criminal justice
14 system, meanwhile, is often insensitive to the
15 circumstances underlying such behavior, with few
16 jurisdictions offering alternatives to
17 incarceration geared specifically to the veteran
18 population. So one recommendation I have is that
19 New York City and also its counterparts on the
20 state level dedicate a funding stream in support
21 of free legal services for this population.
22 According to a recent legal services report, more
23 than 83,000 veterans in the city are income-
24 eligible for free legal services. In addition,
25 the American Bar Association has deemed enlisted

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2 personnel at the first six pay grades eligible for
3 free representation. In spite of qualifying
4 financially for such services, however,
5 individuals in need of representation have
6 remarkably few options. While the New York City
7 Bar Association sponsors a monthly pro bono for VA
8 claimants, there are currently no providers of
9 comprehensive legal services for this population
10 beyond my own very small scale project. While
11 state and city funding streams exist to support
12 representation and public assistance in Social
13 Security proceedings, there is no comparable
14 funding source for VA benefits and military
15 discharge representation. At a moment in which
16 private foundations are severely limiting their
17 grant making efforts, public money is especially
18 vital for this fast growing population. Just like
19 the Disability Advocacy Program funding, this
20 money would serve as a sound investment. At
21 Swords to Plowshares, a legal service provider in
22 San Francisco that represents VA claimants, every
23 \$1 used to fund VA benefit representation
24 generates more than \$26 in benefits directly to
25 the veteran. Also existing legal service

1 providers must make a greater effort to integrate
2 veterans and service members into their practices.
3 Since military status tends to complicate family
4 and housing proceedings, civil legal service
5 attorneys tend to lack the expertise to accept
6 these cases. Meanwhile, the state-specific nature
7 of these proceedings removes them from the purview
8 of military attorneys, leaving a pronounced void
9 in services. The city should dedicate funding for
10 the retention and training of legal service
11 providers in this area. The city should also take
12 steps to ensure greater cultural competency among
13 such traditional first responders as police,
14 paramedics, child welfare agents, teachers and
15 employers. Often unfamiliar with the practical
16 and emotional needs of returning veterans, these
17 figures should be trained to recognize and respond
18 to the very challenges of deployment, homecoming
19 and reintegration into civilian life. Veterans
20 should not have to sacrifice their rights to child
21 custody, employment or housing as a result of the
22 insensitivity of civilian agents. Area courts
23 should explore and promote alternatives to
24 incarceration for offenders with service-related
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2 psychological disorders. While the city currently
3 sponsors a mental health court and a number of
4 drug treatment courts, these programs have
5 reported only a small percentage of veterans among
6 their respective populations. Whether these
7 findings are due to deficiencies in screening or a
8 failure to divert mentally ill veterans to these
9 existing programs, courts must make a greater
10 effort to identify these veterans and refer them
11 to treatment. And important first step would be
12 to incorporate VA and nonprofit veteran service
13 providers into the network of providers already
14 affiliated with the city's mental health and drug
15 treatment courts. Once screened for veteran
16 status defendants should also be paired with
17 veteran mentors, a treatment method that has
18 proven particularly effective in Erie County's
19 Veteran Court. Finally, state and local elected
20 officials should demand greater federal oversight
21 over New York City's VA benefits office. Within a
22 national system notorious for its injustice and
23 inefficiency, the Houston Street Regional Office
24 has earned the reputation as one of the very worst
25 offices in the entire country. Even before its

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2 management was dismissed for encouraging claims
3 processors to backdate documents, the office was
4 known for its interminable review periods, often
5 exceeding one year per claim, and its substandard
6 accuracy rates. The Manhattan Regional Office is
7 a particularly grim illustration of the
8 consequences of the federal Veterans Benefit
9 Administration's ill-conceived work credit system,
10 under which claims reviewers are rewarded based on
11 the quantity and not the quality of the claims
12 they process. The resulting combination of too
13 much work and too little time ultimately gives
14 rise to premature and inaccurate determinations.
15 Thank you for allowing me to testify and I'd be
16 happy to answer any questions you might have.

17 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: Yes, right
18 after the next speaker we will go into questions.
19 Good to see you.

20 CAROL GARDENER: Good afternoon,
21 everyone. My name is Carol Gardener. I represent
22 Fitzgerald House. We do transitional housing for
23 homeless veterans. Councilman Sanders touched on
24 the main key thing that I'm here today to talk
25 about, which are the homeless veterans in New York

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2 City. The reason for me being here today is I
3 just came for a meeting and DHS gave a breakdown
4 that \$74 million has been given to New York City
5 through the stimulus and me sitting there to find
6 out if we would be getting part of this and how
7 will this be helping veterans and to my surprise
8 there was nothing in the list to help veterans
9 exclusively out of this \$74 million. I stood up
10 and asked how I could get help for the veterans in
11 Fitzgerald House. I was told that that we didn't
12 have a contract with DHS and unless we had a
13 contract with DHS to serve these veterans, we
14 would get nothing to help these veterans. This is
15 what I was told by the individual who gave the
16 speech from DHS what I needed to do was start
17 getting in touch with all the politicians in my
18 area and get on their case for them to go after
19 the money for these veterans. So, Councilman
20 Sanders, my main reason to be sitting here today
21 is for you and your members to get together to see
22 how a part of this \$74 million will be allocated
23 to help these homeless veterans, and not just the
24 homeless veterans, but the veterans that are in
25 the shelters who do not want to be in the

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2 shelters. A lot of these young Iraqi veterans who
3 are coming back home do not want to be in
4 shelters. How can we work together to help these
5 men and women that are coming back now? There is
6 no housing for them and they are ending up in the
7 shelters with their children. Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: Thank you.

9 Before I respond I want to recognize that we've
10 been joined by one of the senior members of the
11 City Council, senior in stature of course. I'm
12 speaking about Council Member Fidler of Brooklyn.
13 Brooklyn is dominating this panel. You raise a
14 very worthy question, Ms. Gardener. I will have
15 this committee write to the DHS and first things
16 first, get it on paper what they're saying. Get
17 them to commit to making these great statements on
18 paper that they are not doing anything
19 specifically for veterans if a group does not have
20 a contract. So I want to find out exactly what
21 they're saying and from there we have no problems
22 of tackling it.

23 CAROL GARDENER: This has to be
24 done like fast. The money will be distributed by
25 September 30th. The RFP is out April 30th.

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2 Everything has to be in HUD by the April 18th and
3 the money will be distributed by September 30th.

4 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: That timeline
5 is impressive. I can't argue that. Certainly a
6 call to the mayor, I think I heard Council Member
7 Nelson speak of that. I think that you're right,
8 if the RFP is due in less than two weeks, you're
9 really speaking about a phone call first to DHS to
10 let them have the opportunity to explain what
11 they're saying and then a follow-up to the mayor.
12 Would you make sure that we do that? If you guys
13 would make sure that we do that. My own style,
14 just for the sake of my committee, is to merely
15 raise two questions. I'm not one of these chairs
16 that believe in talking. I like my committee
17 members to have a chance to get in there. So at
18 best you'll hear me speak of two different things
19 and then I yield and come back with many more.
20 But I want my committee members in these things.
21 Ma'am, you spoke of dedicated legal services. You
22 spoke of the city's need to have a funding source
23 for dedicated legal services for the veterans. I
24 just wanted to underline your point that it is
25 cost effective. The monies that the city would go

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for would more than pay for itself because we're talking federal money that the city would receive. The same idea of earned income tax credit would apply here. Spending some money to help people to get into the system to get into a way to care for themselves would return more money to this city than what it expends. I will stop here for a moment and see if any of my colleagues have any questions. Council Member Avella?

COUNCIL MEMBER AVELLA: First of all I want to thank both of you for your testimony. I'd like to talk to you after you're finished to follow up on some of the issues that you mentioned. Ms. Gardener, when you asked DHS about the \$74 million, did they say across the board none of that is going to be specifically targeted for homeless veterans?

CAROL GARDENER: It's targeted just to help homelessness in New York City. But there is no group out there that exclusively deals with veterans. The reason why I don't have a contract with DHS is because I did not want to have civilian contracts. If I have a contract with DHS, I have to take anyone and everyone that comes

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2 in. I wanted to deal exclusively with veterans
3 and therefore I was not given a contract from DHS.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER AVELLA: I just find
5 it amazing that out of \$74 million there can't be
6 some allocation for homeless veterans, which we
7 know is a serious problem. I just wanted to make
8 one comment, Mr. Chair. What I understand from
9 staff is that the Mayor's Office of Veterans
10 Affairs was invited to this hearing and chose not
11 to come and not to testify. Once again, I think
12 it's an absolute disgrace that the Mayor's Office
13 of Veterans Affairs just sits around and does
14 absolutely nothing.

15 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: Just as a
16 point of information, you are right about them not
17 being here to testify. I have been informed that
18 two members of the Mayor's Office of Veterans
19 Affairs are in the audience. I was going to
20 identify them, but it doesn't take away from your
21 basic point.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER AVELLA: Mr. Chair,
23 I could care less whether they're in the room or
24 in the building or on the block. If they're not
25 here to testify and talk about what they're going

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2 to do it's meaningless. The members of the
3 audience and the public obviously don't know this,
4 but the Chair had set of a tour of MOVA with the
5 commissioner. The Chair was a little bit late and
6 asked me to run the meeting until he got there. I
7 asked the Commissioner of MOVA what I thought was
8 a very simple question just to get the discussion
9 started. I asked what the budget of the agency
10 was and he did not know what the budget of his own
11 agency as. Then when I pressed it further, he
12 sort of seemed to indicate that this was somehow
13 confidential information. I've got to tell you,
14 we always thought MOVA was bad, and it's not
15 getting any better. I have to put that on the
16 record because everybody here and the people who
17 have testified have legitimate issues and we need
18 cooperation from the administration. If anything,
19 MOVA should be out in front if that's their
20 responsibility, to help the veterans of this city.
21 It is just unbelievable. They should be here
22 testifying. I appreciate your comment, Mr. Chair,
23 but I don't care where they are, unless they're
24 sitting there and telling us what they're doing,
25 then in my opinion they're doing nothing and

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2 that's probably why they're not testifying. You
3 said I was good at speaking.

4 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: Tony, nobody
5 could stop you if they wanted to my friend. And I
6 don't want to. I don't believe that you ladies
7 are prepared to testify today? I'll take that as
8 a no. I will withhold judgment on it. We will
9 invite the commissioner to come to us again on
10 another day. I'm a man of great faith and I will
11 hold out and invite him to come. Certainly, MOVA
12 has a place to play in the spectrum of all of the
13 organizations that should be looking out for the
14 veteran. I believe they should be at the
15 pinnacle. They should be at the top. They should
16 be one of the most leading organizations in doing
17 this. I will hold out so I can hear how they're
18 doing and how they want to do. Having said that,
19 are there any more questions from my colleagues
20 for these good people who have testified? I will
21 go back to you for a second or two. Talk to me
22 about the VA more. I'm very interested,
23 especially from the Urban Justice Center. How has
24 been your history of working with the Veterans
25 Administration? How's it going?

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2 RACHEL NATELSON: Well, the VA is
3 actually divided into two very distinct universes.
4 There's the Veteran Health Administration and the
5 Veteran Benefits Administration. My experience
6 and the problems I've encountered have much more
7 to do with the Veteran Benefits Administration
8 than the Health Administration. That's not to say
9 that there isn't room for lots of improvement,
10 particularly with respect to overlooked
11 populations like women veterans within the health
12 system. But I think for the most part, certainly
13 the offsite vet centers that limit their services
14 to counseling; I enjoy a very good relationship
15 with the various vet centers. VA Benefits
16 Association and its representatives here in New
17 York and the New York office for those who don't
18 know, the office based on Houston Street serves
19 all of Eastern New York State. As I say and as
20 I've said before, it's a complete disaster. In a
21 way it's a product of a much larger broken system.
22 The way that the system throughout the country
23 exists, a very big burden is placed on the veteran
24 to prove that he or she is not committing claimant
25 fraud. There's an enormous presumption that the

1 person applying for benefits is making it up. The
2 claims processors are trained to regard themselves
3 as sort of guardians of the public instead of
4 servants to these veterans. Unfortunately, the
5 benefits office in New York is regarded just about
6 universally as one of the most corrupt and least
7 effective regional offices in the entire country.
8 It actually got to the point where there was a
9 scandal a few months ago and a number of managers
10 in that office were dismissed because it had come
11 to the attention of investigators that they were
12 encouraging their claims reviewers to backdate
13 documents to make it seem as if the waiting period
14 for processing claims hadn't been as long as it
15 was. There was also evidence of document
16 destruction and tampering. I certainly don't
17 blame the front line employees, the claim
18 processor themselves because there's clearly a
19 message coming from on high telling these
20 employees that there is an incentive to deny
21 people benefits out of hand and then just leave it
22 to the appeals process to straighten out whether
23 the determinations are accurate or not. If you're
24 told that you're not going to get credit for your
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2 job unless you process a certain number of claims
3 every day and you're faced with mounting piles of
4 pending claims, you're going to do anything you
5 can to get those papers off your desk. You would
6 be amazed at the sort of sheer leaps of logic that
7 you see in some of these VA regional office
8 denials. An office will claim that there's no
9 diagnosis to support the claim and in black and
10 white there'll be no fewer than three diagnosis
11 presented as supporting evidence. There's so
12 little oversight that there aren't consequences
13 for these claim reviewers saying, "well black is
14 white and I'll leave it to the appeals stage for
15 them to say white is white."

16 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: I'll yield to
17 you, sir.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER NELSON: Thank you,
19 Mr. Chair. The problems with the denial going to
20 the appeals review board, is it mostly from post-
21 traumatic stress disorder cases?

22 RACHEL NATELSON: It's a lot easier
23 to accuse somebody of malingering or making up
24 symptoms. If you can point to a severed limb, you
25 go a lot further toward illustrating or backing up

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2 your claim. But I think there's also a culture
3 with the VA Benefits Administration of sort of
4 undermining. I know that the VA Health
5 Administration sort of prides itself on developing
6 resources for returning veterans with
7 psychological problems. There's a lot of suicide
8 prevention work being done and a lot of clinical
9 work being done. The VHA recognizes the parity
10 between mental and physical illness. That
11 recognition has not made its way to the Veterans
12 Benefits Administration. One example I always use
13 is the clinical manual that the VA gives to the
14 contract doctors that do the examinations
15 instructs them to get as much detail about the
16 episode that triggered the PTSD as they possibly
17 because the manual says in black and white that
18 the symptoms of PTSD are easy to fake. Meanwhile,
19 one of the diagnostic criteria of PTSD is an
20 inability to recall specific aspects of the
21 trauma. So in certain ways there are basic
22 inconsistencies.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER NELSON: Ms.

24 Natelson, you're a veritable font of information
25 in this area and you present your case very well.

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2 Is there a percentage breakdown with claims
3 between post-traumatic stress disorder and others;
4 not psychological?

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RACHEL NATELSON: I'm not aware
6 such a breakdown exists. If somebody wanted to do
7 it through a Freedom of Information Act but no one
8 has done it to date. I don't know what kind of
9 obstacles would be in place or how easy it would
10 be to do that kind of a study.

11

COUNCIL MEMBER NELSON: Is there a
12 percentage approximately of the amount of claims
13 that are turned down immediately? Is it 100% or
14 is it 50% or anything?

15

RACHEL NATELSON: If you're in New
16 York? To be honest, I know that they keep records
17 of national statistics but I'm not certain whether
18 they do a state by state breakdown. I could look
19 into that.

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COUNCIL MEMBER NELSON: Also, there
21 has been an alarming increase in post-traumatic
22 stress disorder claims more so than in my era, for
23 instance, the Vietnam era. Has there been a study
24 on perhaps why that is the case?

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RACHEL NATELSON: I'm not an

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authority in this area, but I know there are certain things about the way this war is being waged, the absence of traditional front lines, the sense that there's really no safe zone and sort of the mindset that creates, the sort of hyper alertness. In certain cases it's a mindset that applies to every battle. But I think in this particular battle because danger is so inherent every minute of every day, I'm amazed that anyone can come back without having psychological scars.

COUNCIL MEMBER NELSON: I just wanted to get to the core of what might be the situation. I hope we will be working and strongly requesting the administration to actually find funding. I know that the window of opportunity is closing. Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: Thank you, sir. Are there any more questions for these very worthy witnesses? Continue to do the good work. We will be speaking with you further. Will you be kind enough to call your next witnesses?

FEMALE VOICE: Peter Bronson and I apologize, there's another where I'm not sure what your writing is; from the Black Veterans for

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2 Social Justice. I'm sorry, I couldn't read it.

3 Jose Cabrera [phonetic]?

4 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: Thank you. I
5 should have said for myself that I will mess up
6 people's names left, right and center. I usually
7 ask for permission. It took me six years to get
8 your name right, Tony. And that's just the first
9 name. Job Mashariki is no stranger. He has made
10 his name known. In the order that you were called
11 up, would you would be kind enough to testify.
12 I'm wondering who this gentleman supports in the
13 middle, but I'm learning fast. No, you don't have
14 to tell me. Strike that from the record. In the
15 other that you were called up, would you be kind
16 enough to testify?

17 PETER BRONSON: My name is Peter
18 Bronson. I represent the Coalition of Veterans in
19 Pain and Distress and Veterans for Peace. I was
20 kind of surprised by the title of this hearing
21 today because a lot of the needs and concerns the
22 committee has dealt with for the past two years
23 and we've been coming to meetings. The Department
24 of Homeless Services have been here many times and
25 from what we can see, even though we were promised

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2 100 beds in 100 days or some phenomenal thing like
3 that, we're still finding the problem of
4 homelessness overpowering. This is from *Newsday*
5 last week, "Brain Injuries on the Military's
6 Mind", a plan to track vet's health care. If
7 they're just getting to these things, when are
8 they going to do them? It seems a little late to
9 begin thinking about a plan when we're 48 deaths
10 shy of 5,000 deaths in Iraq and Afghanistan
11 combined that we know of, plus the millions of
12 civilians who have suffered needlessly. They
13 should be considered too. There are several
14 issues I wanted to take up. One is on the subject
15 of mental health and punishment. Last year a
16 group of us went up to Fort Drum, it was a march
17 across New York State. We were impressed. There
18 were 10,500 soldiers on the base at Fort Drum, the
19 most deployed base on the country. There were 24
20 beds for mental health. The base commander had a
21 practice of publishing the names of his soldiers
22 who were arrested for DWI or similar offenses in
23 the Watertown area. The newspaper had like eight
24 or ten pages of photographs, small one-inch
25 photographs. These guys aren't getting treated.

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An organization that we met when we go to the New York State Council of Veterans Organizations had tried unsuccessfully to establish a program there where veterans would be screened and people on the base would receive treatment instead. We've gotten reports that in the past year the VA has been encouraging Iraq and Afghanistan vets to get medical discharges and by doing that, they avoid paying them larger benefits when they get out. It's wrong. They should be allowed to be discharged and turned over to the VA who would be responsible for their treatment. As a Korean vet, I guess I'm one in that group that is next to depart. In line with what Council Member Nelson spoke about, many of our members are just beginning to fall into the homeless and show signs of things that happened many, many years ago. I direct the committee to a book, "Home From the Front" by Morris Lifton [phonetic] in which he's the definitive expert on Vietnam. He describes the reason that there are so many delays in these symptoms coming to the fore. Another thing I wanted to point out that's very interesting with the VA situation. Many people may not be aware of

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2 the history of the VA. The VA was a segregated
3 organization when it was established. The VA
4 integrated when the services integrated after
5 World War II. Something that's happened then and
6 is continuing now is when the last 40 years of
7 administration in Washington leave, many of you
8 may notice, they made a rush to take political
9 appointees and put them in civil service
10 positions. By doing that, long after an
11 administration that's fallen out of favor has
12 passed on, their hallmarks stay with the
13 committees because they actually are the ones that
14 run things. Just to give you an example, in a
15 book called, "The Consumer's Republic, Consumption
16 in Postwar America" by Lizbeth Cohen, on Page 171,
17 she says, "In New York and New Jersey suburbs,
18 fewer than 100 of the 67,000 mortgage insured by
19 the GI Bill supported home purchases by non-
20 whites." In *Newsday* they had a report where they
21 showed maps of the foreclosures. In Southwest
22 Queens and in Bed-Stuy and the sections of
23 Brooklyn that are predominately minority sections,
24 the map is black with foreclosures. Bayside and
25 the other areas there are far fewer foreclosures.

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2 So my point is that partly because of these
3 historic things that took place and partly because
4 of the way black vets didn't get the same breaks
5 that white vets got that's leading to a lot of the
6 problems that we see today because now they're the
7 first ones to suffer to lose their homes. One
8 other thing, a couple of us are taking a home-
9 training course to become a veteran's claim
10 officer. When I was up in Albany, Jim McDonough,
11 who is the state commissioner of Veterans Affairs,
12 told us they don't have money for the counties and
13 the states to hire any more people to help
14 veterans with their claims. I'm retired and
15 fortunately I'm a retired teacher from New York
16 and on pension. I'm willing to do this work for
17 nothing and I still can't get appointed by the VA.
18 I've had difficulty getting appointment. So I
19 think there's a lot of talent in our community
20 that wants to help veterans because we're doing it
21 all the time that would volunteer to do a lot of
22 the heavy lifting that's necessary. Thanks for
23 your time.

24 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: Thank you,
25 sir.

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2 ORONDE TAKUMA: Good afternoon. My
3 name is Oronde Takuma. I'm representing the Black
4 Veterans for Social Justice. On Friday we
5 celebrated our 30th anniversary. We've been out
6 in the trenches in war and we've been out in the
7 trenches back home fighting for the rights of
8 veterans who deserve every consideration in terms
9 of them reintegrating back into society. This
10 country asks people and sometimes they don't ask;
11 they draft people. They ask people to go and
12 fight for the policies of this country whether we
13 agree with them or not. There were a lot of
14 promises made to veterans. Before we go, while
15 we're in battle and even when we come home there
16 are a lot of promises made to secure veterans and
17 their families. That has not happened. When it
18 comes to the soldier and his family, there's
19 always a scarcity of resources. We can't find
20 money for the resources. Even when money is
21 targeted for veterans we can't find it because it
22 gets lost in the bureaucracy. The stimulus
23 packaged that was talked about earlier, the \$74
24 million, and the other stimulus package dollars
25 out there that should be targeted towards veterans

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2 and their families. That's not to take away from
3 the general population, but there should be
4 targeted resources for veterans and their
5 families. Many of those veterans are in
6 foreclosure because they had multiple deployments,
7 they had injuries, they had divorces and they had
8 a lot of social issues, some related to post-
9 traumatic stress disorders and the like. So we
10 wanted to come today first to welcome you to the
11 chairmanship of this committee and hope that this
12 committee will be a proactive active committee and
13 work with the veterans organizations who have been
14 out in the trenches for years dealing with these
15 same issues. There may be a different name to
16 them at different times, but it all winds up to
17 the veterans being shafted once again. From a
18 black veteran's perspective, this is not new.
19 Black and brown and other veterans have not been
20 given their just due. Reparations and the
21 benefits that are supposed to come with your
22 service that are promised to us have not happened.
23 Our position is that any veteran who put on that
24 uniform and who was in the military should be
25 guaranteed certain things, from education to

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2 housing to employment. We don't distinguish
3 between what we call people with bad paper, et
4 cetera. And a lot of the bad paper, especially
5 during the Vietnam era was based on racism and the
6 military not being prepared to deal with black
7 veterans and our culture, et cetera. A lot of
8 people got bad paper with metal plates in their
9 head, missing limbs and stomachs but they have bad
10 paper. Do you understand? So that's an injustice
11 that has to be addressed in this war and in all
12 the other wars that there has to be equality. If
13 you want to ask people to risk their life and limb
14 and you make those promises, you have to fulfill
15 those promises. I think it's more our
16 responsibility to make sure that the government
17 fulfills those responsibilities. It's our
18 responsibility I know to organize veterans and
19 that's what we do, or we attempt to do. But even
20 with that, the government who we fought for have
21 to work with us. We shouldn't feel like we are
22 second-class citizens or that we should be a
23 footnote to all the things that's going on in
24 terms of the resources. We just gave Wall Street
25 billions of dollars. The same people who created

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2 this condition. We found the money overnight. It
3 was an emergency call to save the banks and Wall
4 Street, et cetera. I haven't heard any emergency
5 about the veterans and the needs of veterans.

6 There are no caucuses. There's no presidential
7 commission to talk about the needs of veterans. I
8 think that's a shame for that not to happen and
9 for this stimulus to go forward without there
10 being a significant amount of it directed towards
11 those veterans who are here and the veterans who
12 are going to be coming home. I'm an angry veteran
13 and I want to use that anger in a positive way.

14 But I want you to know that we're angry about it
15 and serious about veterans finally being addressed
16 from housing to employment, et cetera. The \$500
17 million for green jobs and training, again, I want
18 to see veterans be a part of those 500 million
19 green economy dollars that are in the stimulus as
20 well. People look at veterans as only people who
21 have went to war and were involved in death and
22 destruction. We are concerned about our
23 environment as well. If we change our economy to
24 green and deal with the soil and the oil, we'd
25 have fewer wars in the first place. We want to

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2 see those green dollars that's being targeted come
3 to the veteran community. We're warriors but when
4 we came home, especially in our community,
5 veterans contributed greatly to our community in
6 terms of leadership, et cetera. We don't want to
7 be like what happened to Joe Lewis who gave up his
8 lucrative boxing career, spent four years in the
9 military without pay and then have the government
10 say he owed taxes and hounded him all the way down
11 until he became a doorman in Las Vegas to try to
12 pay back the taxes. He spent four years of his
13 life contributing to the war effort and to the
14 government. That's also a crime that needs to be
15 addressed. That's happening every day in our
16 community. We want to give a voice to the
17 veterans, especially black and Latino veterans.
18 We want to be a part of this process. When the
19 dollars flow, we want the government of the
20 people, for the people and by the people to make
21 sure that the veterans that you send to war are
22 taken care of when they come home. That's what
23 our mission is. For 30 years we've been in the
24 trenches fighting. On top of the post-traumatic
25 stress from the war, we've got post-traumatic

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2 stress fighting our own government to try to get
3 the resources that we thought were guaranteed to
4 veterans. We think that education for veterans
5 should be free, especially in CUNY and SUNY. We
6 have a university here and I think veterans should
7 get free education. It shouldn't be pitting one
8 class of veterans against the other. It shouldn't
9 be that if you were in combat that you get it and
10 if you weren't in combat then you can't get it. I
11 think all veterans in terms of the city university
12 and state university should have free education.
13 That's one of the positions that we want to put
14 forth. We hope that this committee will help
15 fight for that. We can't find any statistics on
16 veterans being impacted with the foreclosures.
17 We've been looking for data to tell us what is
18 happening with veterans in terms of the
19 foreclosures and the subprime lending scam. We're
20 quite sure in our community where the wealth is
21 being extracted out by the millions that that's
22 affecting veterans. Every household in our
23 community you're going to find a veteran
24 somewhere. We want help getting the information
25 in terms of what is happening with veterans in

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2 terms of their housing. That's in terms of home
3 ownership as well as evictions. And the green
4 economy is another piece. We want to make sure
5 that a significant amount of those dollars are
6 targeted towards veterans and their families.
7 Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: Thank you,
9 sir. Mr. Cabrera.

10 JOSE CABRERA: Thank you. Council
11 Members, my name is Jose Cabrera. I'm a United
12 States Marine. I did two tours in Iraq in 2003
13 and 2005. A big issue for veterans my age right
14 now is we're coming back to a fractured economy
15 and a fractured job market wondering where our
16 place is. Unemployment and homeless are big
17 issues. How do you combat that? I want to talk
18 about disabled veterans and vending. I think this
19 is one of the best ways for people coming back to
20 work; to go out and do an honest day's job for an
21 honest day's pay. Right now the city is fighting
22 its disabled vets when it comes to vending. If
23 you're not a veteran you can get a permit to work.
24 But if you are a veteran, you cannot get a permit
25 to work. They will refuse you. Even though state

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2 law says that a veteran has a right to vend, the
3 city says they don't. I don't understand why non-
4 veterans and veterans are being treated
5 differently. It seems like discrimination to me.
6 I have friends who are coming back, they're
7 getting laid off, hours are getting cut and I want
8 to say to them that they should vend. The option
9 to vend is in the law. It's there to help us when
10 we need help. I can't do that because it's really
11 not there. The reality of the situation is when
12 you go get your licenses and get what you need,
13 the last step is to get that permit so that you
14 can get for yourself and on that last step you're
15 denied. They'll let you go through the process
16 but at the last step they'll deny you. To
17 somebody my age coming back, it's very
18 frustrating. I fought these last few years.
19 People my age are fighting and then we come back
20 and now we have to fight the city. Why should we
21 have to fight the city? I come from the 6th
22 Communication Battalion based out of Floyd Bennett
23 Field, Brooklyn, a battalion of New Yorkers. We
24 come back and the City of New York is fighting us
25 to work. I'm not asking for a handout, I'm asking

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2 to work. That's what I want to do. I want to
3 work. I don't want to be unemployed; I don't want
4 to end up homeless like some people my age. I
5 want to work. Why can't I work? That's just my
6 question. Why can't people my age work? If this
7 is there to protect us as it's been there since
8 the Civil War, why all of the sudden are people my
9 age being shunned from this when it's a viable
10 source of work? All we're asking for is to work.
11 Guys my age want to work. We don't want to sit
12 around. We don't want to be a burden to society.
13 We want to work. I would hope that this committee
14 would help guys like me who just want to work.
15 The DCA, the Department of Consumer Affairs, they
16 don't want to give us these permits. They're
17 refusing. State law says that we have this right.
18 Their own boss has said that we have a right to
19 restricted area permits, but then when you go with
20 this law and this letter from them and you
21 actually go to get the permit, you're denied. I
22 don't understand this process. I don't understand
23 why the city doesn't want veterans working. It's
24 very confusing. I just hope that somebody on this
25 committee could get to the bottom of this and find

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2 out why we're being turned away and why we're
3 being kept unemployed and why we have to deal with
4 the situation on our own when there is a better
5 way. There is a better way than ending up in a
6 shelter. There is a better way than not being
7 able to provide for yourself and your family.
8 This is on my mind and it's on the minds of a lot
9 of veterans my age and I think it's something that
10 needs to be addressed. Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: Thank you,
12 sir. Would you be kind enough to write a letter
13 to DCA or have a letter written to DCA and copy
14 MOVA to find out what are the regulations? But go
15 a step further; ask for percentages of veterans
16 that have been given these options. Ask how many
17 of them have been veterans and things of that
18 nature. I have some other points but I will yield
19 to Tony and I will come back after him.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER AVELLA: I just
21 wanted to let you know, Mr. Chair that I've been
22 working on this very issue for several years with
23 the veteran's community. As he said, it's an
24 absolute disgrace. By state law, the city must
25 give the veterans a permit and they are not. It

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2 took me quite a bit of effort with the Sponsors
3 Privilege Rule to call up two pieces of
4 legislation that is pending before the Department
5 of Consumer Affairs Committee of this council. We
6 had a hearing and the veterans groups came and as
7 far as I'm concerned the city offered no logical
8 explanation for what's going on. So what I would
9 ask, Mr. Chairman, that you through your position
10 here as chair of the Veterans Committee, talk to
11 the chair of the Consumer Affairs Committee and to
12 the Speaker's Office and find out why we're not
13 moving this legislation to force the
14 administration to follow the law. It's a very
15 simple thing. I couldn't have put it better.
16 Veterans are entitled to a permit. Disabled
17 veterans are being refused a permit. If they have
18 a doctor's appoint or they can't work, they could
19 take the day off. This is a perfect job for them.
20 As he says, all he wants is a job. I've got to
21 tell you that I am disappointed with the
22 administration but I'm also disappointed with the
23 City Council. We've had a hearing on this. I had
24 to force the hearing. Veterans come and they talk
25 about this and nothing ever happens. As the new

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2 chair of this committee, I would appreciate if
3 you'd communicate with Chair Comrie and the
4 Speaker's Office and say enough talk, let's start
5 putting the administration's feet to the fire and
6 have them say why they're not doing it, and if
7 not, let's pass the legislation to make them do
8 it.

9 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: I accept your
10 charge, sir. I will certainly speak to the
11 necessary people. Do me a favor and get me the
12 legislation again so I can have it in hand and not
13 go through that. Good to see you, sir, all yours.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: I want to
15 go back to the foreclosure question. I've done a
16 lot of work down here in and around the subprime
17 lending crisis. I, too, have not seen any data
18 regarding the impacts on veterans. I'm just
19 curious whether either of the two of you that
20 referred to the foreclose crisis and veterans have
21 any reason to believe that veterans are being
22 affected disproportionately? Is there something
23 that I'm missing? We have a Center for New York
24 City Neighborhoods and I will ask them if they
25 have any data, but I'm not seeing why veterans

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would be hit any differently than other New Yorkers who have been sold subprime products. Is there a reason I'm missing?

ORONDE TAKUMA: From my perspective, I know that the African American community was targeted and affected disproportionately to other communities. We know that a large population of homeowners in our community that got ownership has a spouse or someone in their family who is a veteran.

COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: I don't want to cut you off. I acknowledge that and I recognize that. We have data that shows that subprime loans were sold discriminatorily and heavily in the African American community. I recognize that it may well be that the majority of veterans are African American. I'm just asking whether or not there's a direct relationship between the veteran status and subprime loans. Is there something else other than the correlation between the ethnicity of most of the veterans and where the subprime loans were sold? If there is I want to be able to address it. It's the first time I've heard it, so that's why I'm asking.

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2 ORONDE TAKUMA: There's no concrete
3 data that we know about. We're just going by
4 history. We're going by the demographics of our
5 community and what is happening. Large sectors in
6 our community are losing their homes. We assume
7 that a lot of those folks are families of
8 veterans.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: It's not
10 that there was a particular product being offered
11 to veterans, it's the fact that there are so many
12 veterans that are in the communities of color in
13 the city that were sold these products. Thank
14 you.

15 PETER BRONSON: From my standpoint
16 it was historical that if they didn't make as many
17 home loans to black applicants as they did to
18 white applicants that those applicants back in the
19 50s and the 40s when I went to school in the GI
20 Bill and when I had that opportunity weren't able
21 to build up the resources that people at that time
22 were able to do. So now it would seem that they
23 would be suffering as a result of that. But I
24 don't have any empirical data.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: The

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2 subprime lending crisis and the subprime lending
3 period doesn't go back quite that far. So I'm not
4 sure that there is a relationship. I think I
5 understand the answers. Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: Thank you.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: Mr.
8 Chairman, I want to apologize. I have to go
9 across the street to a meeting at City Hall. I
10 don't mean any disrespect to the panel or anyone
11 who hasn't testified.

12 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: I'm just glad
13 you're here sir. By now I trust that everybody
14 understands that City Council people have a lot of
15 stuff going on. At any given time there's at
16 least three or four hearings and you're trying to
17 get as much as you can. You put a lot of stuff
18 out gentleman. I'll just work backwards in no
19 particular order. To President Obama's credit, he
20 is drawing more attention to the veteran's
21 situation than any recent president. Is it
22 anywhere near what we need? It remains to be
23 seen. So far, not yet, but remains to be seen.
24 Less than 100 days, remains to be seen. You
25 mentioned bad paper. I know a little something

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2 about that. I served in Marine Corps 2/1. The
3 Marines are traditionally the branch that has the
4 fewest amounts of so-called minority people in
5 there. It's easy to get some bad paper. I'm
6 blessed that I didn't. It's very easy to get
7 paper in such an organization. This does need to
8 be looked at. We need to have some type of review
9 board or a better review board. One that is non-
10 Marine or non-service connected to look at all of
11 these things. I sure would have loved being
12 invited to the meeting the other night.

13 ORONDE TAKUMA: You were.

14 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: Is that
15 right?

16 ORONDE TAKUMA: They said you were
17 going on a retreat.

18 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: Not bad. He
19 did his research. I was at a youth retreat. I
20 took a bunch of youth out and taught them
21 leadership. I discovered that I'm not as young as
22 I used to be.

23 ORONDE TAKUMA: But Job will be
24 calling you.

25 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: I'm sure he

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2 will. I know the man. As the author of the
3 strongest anti-predatory lending law in the
4 nation, Local Law 36 of 2002, this basically said
5 to the banks that they couldn't lend money to
6 people who can't pay it back. That's all the law
7 was saying. If you do, you can't tap into New
8 York City monies. That's what they hated. The
9 banks fought it tooth and nail. They hated it.
10 They were making so much theft and plunder from
11 folks. They fought me in City Hall. We won.
12 They fought me in Albany and we won. They took me
13 to federal court and hit me with a very, very
14 interesting thing. They said I was interfering
15 with interstate commerce because now Bank of
16 America and other banks are all over the place.
17 They said I can't interfere with that. What a
18 misuse of the Constitution. I told them then they
19 were going to regret this day. The day will come
20 when you will regret doing this stuff. Of course
21 they do, but that doesn't help the tens of
22 thousands of people who lost their homes when they
23 should not have to the theft and plunder of those
24 robber barons. That's my kindest thing that I
25 will say about them. I'm very familiar with

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2 what's happening in Southeast Queens where the
3 communities of color are located and where I
4 represent. I'm blessed to represent Laurelton,
5 Springfield Gardens, Rosedale, the Rockaways, and
6 there may be more, I don't remember. I will say
7 that in terms of the VA hospital itself, that
8 system, we're about to take a tour of one of the
9 hospitals. I'll leave it unnamed at the moment.
10 We're about to look into that situation to start
11 from scratch. I know that Council Member
12 Monserrate and the worthy people of this committee
13 were doing wondrous things before I got here. Now
14 that I'm here I'm going to try to start from
15 scratch. I'm going to try to take my own
16 prejudices and put them to the side and look at
17 the VA system and let it explain itself. Maybe it
18 is a great thing. Maybe it's just that I don't
19 have the information. I will at least be bold
20 enough to try to look at it that way. They'll
21 speak for themselves I'm sure. Before long I'll
22 know exactly where they stand. We're going to
23 tour one part of the VA hospital system shortly.
24 Gentlemen, I thank you for your participation. I
25 look forward to working with you in the days to

1

2 come.

3

FEMALE VOICE: Dan Rossi

4

[phonetic], Howard Dalton and the Servicewomen's

5

Action Network. I'm sorry; I'm not sure how to

6

pronounce your name.

7

CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: My friends,

8

if I can encourage us to be timely in our

9

statements, I'd appreciate it. No reference to

10

the people now speaking. I'm speaking in general.

11

I should have said it from the very beginning that

12

we need to be timely. Let's have the speakers in

13

the order that they were called.

14

DAN ROSSI: Good afternoon. My

15

name is Dan Rossi. I'm a disabled Vietnam

16

veteran, Marine Corps. I did two tours in

17

Vietnam. I'm going to get right to the point.

18

Are you serious about helping veterans? That's

19

what I want to know. If you say yes, I'm going to

20

hold your feet to the fire right now.

21

CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: Good.

22

DAN ROSSI: We're going to go back

23

to what they were talking on in the vending.

24

There is so much corruption going on in DCA and

25

the food vending industry it's unbelievable. I've

1
2 been working to get these men their jobs to the
3 point of losing my business, losing my home and
4 I've just about had it. I've had it. Yesterday,
5 I had a confrontation with another vendor where
6 they took a disabled veteran, stuck them next to
7 the cart and they were working. They had veteran
8 plastered across the front of the cart. These
9 guys couldn't even speak English. Here they are
10 taking away locations of veterans because the
11 veteran can't get the permit he needs to work.

12 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: Just a point
13 of information. Remember, some veterans may be
14 coming from foreign countries.

15 DAN ROSSI: This veteran is a
16 Vietnam veteran. He's in the audience right now.
17 I asked him to be here.

18 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: No, I mean
19 the veteran who could not speak English.

20 DAN ROSSI: No, these guys weren't
21 veterans. Believe me, there's a lot of games
22 going on. In fact, before I came here, I went to
23 the depot where they work out of because they're
24 all black market guys and I had a talk to the
25 people who owned the place to let them know that

1
2 I'm heavily involved in this and back away. I'm
3 not going to stand and watch veterans be abused by
4 anybody. Here's my point to you. I have a young
5 Marine here, a young Navy veteran who is going to
6 leave here and go to 42 Broadway and he's going to
7 be denied a food vending permit. He's going to
8 have a copy of a letter from the Health Department
9 saying he's entitled to the food vending permit.
10 He's going to have a copy of the law saying he's
11 entitled to the food vending permit. I want you
12 to be next to him when he's denied. I want you to
13 ask those people why he's being denied. We can do
14 more in the next two hours for veterans than you
15 could do in the next ten years. A point of
16 interest, when Councilman Avella introduced his
17 vending bills to give all disabled veterans
18 permits, the only organization in this city that
19 spoke against veterans getting permits was the
20 Urban Justice Center. We found out that the
21 person who represented them had a permit that was
22 supposed to go to a disabled veteran. That's how
23 bad the corruption is in this city. Like I said,
24 I've just about had enough. I've given all I can
25 to these people. I'm asking you to give us one

1
2 hour. Give us one hour of your time and we'll
3 straighten this out today. Then I'm going to put
4 you in the fire. When they tell you he's not
5 entitled to it, you ask the questions why. You go
6 to bat for us if that's what you want to do.
7 That's Marine Corps. That's the kind of Marine I
8 am. There's nothing else to say. So we will be
9 seeing you.

10 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: No question
11 that that is Marine Corps. They will go straight
12 to you. Today is a bad day.

13 DAN ROSSI: What day? You just
14 tell us what time we're going to be there.

15 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: That's Marine
16 Corps too. Miss Patterson, why don't you slip out
17 of the room and call my scheduler and find out
18 what day this week we can be there. Toss my
19 schedule to pieces.

20 DAN ROSSI: How many vets do you
21 want with you? We got a lot of angry guys out
22 there.

23 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: Just two. I
24 tell you what, make it three. Now we're going to
25 tear the place apart today.

1
2 DAN ROSSI: I'm being honest when I
3 say if you go there you're going to see the
4 humiliation that we have to put up with.

5 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: Well just
6 three under those conditions. I want to take more
7 than one because there could be something specific
8 about that one person. Two could do it but give
9 me three.

10 DAN ROSSI: I'll give you three
11 disabled veterans that are all waiting for
12 permits. Let me just go back. Two of our
13 disabled veterans are on this so-called waiting
14 list. They set aside 100 permits for disabled
15 veterans. They are very low numbers. We found
16 out that 66 of the permits went to non-veterans.
17 It's impossible. If you have a waiting list of
18 disabled veterans that have priority, don't you
19 have to go through that list before you give them
20 to someone else?

21 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: Absolutely.

22 DAN ROSSI: That's good enough.

23 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: That is
24 Marine Corps. Were you called up second? I
25 forgot the order. Go ahead.

1
2 HOWARD DALTON: My name is Howard
3 Dalton and I'm a disabled veteran. I have
4 sarcoidosis. That's the disease that killed
5 Bernie Mac. I'm service connected sarcoidosis.
6 I'm at 60% but I have a crippling disease, a
7 chronic disease which is pulmonary in nature. I
8 have seven different issues because I'm taking
9 steroid. I have steroid induced diabetes. I have
10 a number of issues behind the sarcoidosis because
11 of the medicine I have to take. Basically all he
12 told me was that these people are not doctors,
13 these people don't have any medical background.
14 Anytime somebody takes more than 20 milligrams of
15 steroids, it puts them at risk. I've been taking
16 it for three years. I have so many different
17 health issues behind it and I just get turned
18 down. I can't work anywhere. It's unrealistic.
19 I've been in the hospital 14 times in the last 4
20 years. I've been hospitalized between seven and
21 eight days each time. I've been turned down.
22 It's impossible for me to work. What employer is
23 going to hire me and I'm out 14 times in the last
24 four years? It's unrealistic. I suffer from
25 depression behind the sarcoidosis, behind the

1
2 chronic illness. Life right now for me is really
3 rough. I can't do the things that I need to do
4 because of health reasons. I've put on over 60
5 pounds because of the steroids. The sleep apnea
6 is worse, my sexual dysfunction, I have so many
7 different things that are going on with me because
8 of this. All they did was write me denied,
9 denied, denied. What are these people talking
10 about denied? If I have sarcoidosis, I have to
11 take steroids. If I take steroids, this is what
12 it leads to. It's like if you have cancer they
13 have to give you radiation treatment. You're
14 going to suffer whatever goes along with that.
15 Right not I'm really just catching hell. That's
16 all I have to say.

17 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: I will let
18 the next speaker speak before I speak. Good to
19 see you, Captain.

20 ANURADHA BHAGWATI: Good afternoon.
21 My name is Anuradha Bhagwati. I am also a Marine
22 Corps veteran and native New Yorker. I left the
23 Marines as a captain in 2004, went back to school
24 and eventually returned to New York City where I
25 slowly began to fall apart. I had numerous

1
2 injuries both physical and psychological from my
3 time in service. I am currently 20% disabled, but
4 most veterans advocates say my rating should be
5 much, much higher. The VA refuses to acknowledge
6 my psychological wounds because they were based on
7 military sexual trauma, or MST. In the meantime I
8 still have to face the daily struggles of being a
9 veteran in New York City. I'd like to share some
10 of the experiences I've had as a woman veteran in
11 our city's VA facilities. The last place many
12 survivors of MST want to go for treatment or
13 counseling is a VA hospital. My first trip to the
14 Manhattan VA hospital was a nightmare. I felt
15 like I was running a gauntlet as I stepped into
16 the lobby and was confronted by a sea of hostile
17 faces, all of them male. Most veterans and VA
18 employees assume women veterans are secretaries or
19 cleaning staff. Others are quick to harass women
20 veterans, avoid looking us in the eye and refuse
21 us the common courtesy and service that they
22 extend to male veterans. A psychiatrist I saw
23 rolled his eyes at me when I told him I needed to
24 talk to a female doctor. The MST counselor was so
25 overbooked that she had to refer me to another MST

1
2 counselor at a vet center, making my bi-weekly
3 commute three hours instead of one and a half.
4 One physician was so shocked that I'd been a
5 Marine that he told me I looked like a shopkeeper.
6 An orthopedics resident refused to treat my
7 shoulder because I could raise my arm over my head
8 on command. He told that some of the guys he
9 treated had been through much worse. He told me I
10 just needed to get used to the pain. I've been
11 lectured and counseled by dozen of nurses and many
12 of them women; who feel that they are at liberty
13 to talk to me in an inappropriately familiar or
14 unprofessional manner because I am a woman. When
15 I shared some of my frustrations with the women's
16 veterans coordinator she told me I should be happy
17 to have free health care. Other systemic problems
18 at the city's VA hospitals do not discriminate on
19 the basis of gender. I had to wait almost a year
20 for pain management treatment at the Manhattan VA
21 Hospital. During that time I was forced to seek
22 outside care and pay thousands of dollars out of
23 pocket because the VA refused to help me any
24 sooner. I am now forced to travel four hours to
25 get treatment from the Bronx VA Hospital for

1
2 chiropractic care that's unavailable in Manhattan
3 or Brooklyn. I wait a month between appointments
4 even though I require two sessions a week. When
5 my VA claim for PTSD, anxiety and depression from
6 MST was recently rejected by the New York Regional
7 Office I had to make a difficult choice between
8 appealing my claim and having my trauma dragged on
9 for several for years or giving up. Being a
10 veteran in the city is already a fulltime job.
11 Every hour spent traveling to a VA facility;
12 waiting for providers or fighting the VA
13 bureaucracy is emotionally and physically
14 draining. The VA has re-traumatized me for years.
15 I have wanted to give up this fight too many times
16 to count. This spring I decided to appeal my
17 claim because I was blessed to receive the help of
18 a pro bono attorney through the Urban Justice
19 Center's Veterans and Service Members Project. I
20 am also lucky that right now I have the time and
21 support from family and friends to survive the
22 ordeal of filing a long and arduous appeal to the
23 VA. Lots of other veterans aren't so fortunate.
24 It's a shame that the VA forces veterans to spend
25 years of their lives to claim the justice they

1
2 deserve. It shouldn't be the responsibility of
3 wounded and injured veterans to fix this broken
4 system or to fight for the quality health care and
5 benefit they deserve. Most of us don't have the
6 resources or ability to be fulltime advocates. It
7 is the government's responsibility to serve our
8 nation's veterans. It is the government's
9 responsibility to ensure that regional offices
10 treat each veteran's claim with the care veterans
11 deserve. It is the government's responsibility to
12 ensure that PTSD, MST and all other psychological
13 conditions are treated with the appropriate sense
14 of urgency that any seriously wounded veteran
15 ought to receive. I'd like to close by briefly
16 introducing the organization that I direct here in
17 New York City, the Service Women's Action Network,
18 or SWAN. SWAN aims to be the key national policy
19 advocacy services and support organization for
20 service women and women veterans. We focus on key
21 issues and services that have been largely ignored
22 or denied by the veterans community, the
23 government and the public at large. The issues
24 faced by women in combat, military sexual trauma,
25 comprehensive health care for women, the failures

1
2 of the VA benefit system for women, the issues
3 faced by homeless women veterans, the
4 disproportionate targeting of women and women of
5 color in particular by the don't ask don't tell
6 policy, providing safe and healing retreats for
7 women veterans and providing information and
8 guidance to women considering military service.
9 SWAN is filling a giant void in advocacy and
10 services for our nation's military women and needs
11 all the support it can get during these next few
12 critical months. Please contact our office for
13 further information. Thank you for your time.

14 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: Thank you. I
15 have just a couple of questions. When you went
16 into the VA, did you go alone, did you go with a
17 DAV, did you go with the VFW, or did you go with a
18 newer organization? When you applied for your
19 disability benefits did you go alone or did you go
20 with a service organization?

21 HOWARD DALTON: I went because I
22 couldn't breathe. Sarcoidosis is a pulmonary
23 disease. I was rushed in by the ambulance.

24 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: I'm glad that
25 you got there. But was an organization

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representing you? Ok. I just wanted to be clear.

ANURADHA BHAGWATI: I went in alone. I don't know who would have gone with me at that point. I was making phone calls to veteran friends out in California for emotional support at that point. You're alone walking into that hospital.

CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: Yes, you are. When I received mine, I lost 10% of my hearing on some mountain somewhere. It's out there waiting for me no doubt. But I was blessed to bump into the DAV and they were able to help navigate there. I do not think I would have been able to navigate that system by myself. I'm revealing bias and I'm supposed to hold out for a little bit. I'll do it this way. It is a very difficult system to navigate and I would argue made that way. I will stop there because I don't want to reveal any more of my own views until I go and see it myself. Now that I am the chair, go and see it myself. I think SWAN is a great idea. I think it's an idea that's overdue. It's sad in one sense that we have to have it, but better that we have it. In a just world we wouldn't need any of these things.

1
2 Until that world is here we need SWAN. We'll work
3 with you. We have no problems of working with
4 people to see what we can do. You've got to find
5 an organization. To go by yourself is a recipe
6 for being picked off. God willing you will bump
7 into worthy people who want to see good things
8 happen. There are organizations out here. Right
9 at the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs, they
10 have several organizations that have offices in
11 there. I forget their address offhand, but I
12 would start by going there and saying to those
13 organizations, you have helped people navigate
14 these waters long before me, I need some help. I
15 would start that way. Please let me know how it's
16 going. I thank you for being here. We have a lot
17 of Marines coming out here today. Is this Marine
18 Corps day? Good to see you back, captain.

19 FEMALE VOICE: Martin Diaz and
20 Joseph Bellow [phonetic].

21 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: If you guys
22 are Marines too then I know there will be some fix
23 going on. Please speak in the order that you came
24 up.

25 MARTIN DIAZ: My name is Martin

1
2 Diaz. I'm a US Navy veteran. I'm disabled also,
3 but if it helps, my brother is a Marine veteran.
4 I'm also here on behalf of the permit and
5 licensing for disabled veterans. I have a letter
6 here from the director of the Department of
7 Health. I'll gladly give you a copy of it. It
8 states in the fifth paragraph, "restricted area
9 mobile food vending permit which does not require
10 a waiting list". These permits are exempt from
11 the statutory limits which apply to street vending
12 and as such do not authorize street vending. They
13 do however authorize vending on private property
14 in a commercially zoned area or on property under
15 the jurisdiction of the New York City Department
16 of Parks and Recreation. I just came from 42
17 Broadway and they denied me a permit. They denied
18 me a special yellow license for eight months when
19 I was entitled to one. They told me I needed a
20 letter from the VA. I brought them three letters
21 on three separate occasions from the VA. Then on
22 the third occasion Mr. Dupree, who works at DCA,
23 denied me and said it needed to be signed by Mr.
24 Velasquez at the DAV. I returned the letter to
25 the DAV and I spoke to Mr. Velasquez. He says,

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2 what the hell is he talking about? I never did
3 this. He's been working there for almost eight
4 years I believe. I don't know what's going on but
5 there's something wrong with the DCA and the city.
6 It should be addresses, not next week, not a month
7 from now, it should be addressed today. I
8 remember when I was enlisting there was a print on
9 the wall that stated, "Not what can your country
10 do for you but what can you do for your country."
11 We come back disabled, hurt and even those that
12 are not disabled like my brother is giving to the
13 community by becoming an NYPD. He's NYPD right
14 now. As we come back we still work with other
15 people. We still are willing to help others.
16 I've met many other veterans whom I don't even
17 know their last names and they're willing to help
18 me more than my own family members. What's going
19 on? I want to know what is going on with this
20 country and with the city. Why are we not
21 receiving what we're entitled to? We did our part
22 and you did yours. Let the city do their part
23 now. Thank you.

24 JOSEPH BELLOW: How are you doing?
25 My name is Joe Bellow. I'm also a disabled Navy

1
2 veteran. I don't want to talk about the VA. I
3 think you pretty much have a sense of what's going
4 on at the Veterans Administration. My remarks
5 will be focused basically on the city. We have a
6 lot of issues here in the city. I think you've
7 heard a few of them but you haven't heard all of
8 them. It's not that the committee has done
9 wondrous things but I'd like to think that the
10 committee actually has laid the groundwork for you
11 to start moving on some things. You have a lot of
12 veterans in this city who are angry at what's
13 going on and angry at what seems to be happening.
14 There's a high level of frustration with the
15 bureaucracy. I belong to a couple of democratic
16 clubs and too many times I hear from elected
17 officials that veterans' issues are federal
18 issues. I consistently tell them it's not a
19 federal issue. All politics are local; all
20 veterans' issues are local as well. When a
21 veteran returns to their community, this is the
22 place where they're coming home to. They're going
23 to Workforce One and all these places where they
24 have to go or where they need to find some help
25 and services and they're being stonewalled. I

1
2 think you're getting a dual process from what
3 you're seeing at the VA and then what you see in
4 terms of the city bureaucracy and government.
5 Unfortunately that does start with a lack of
6 leadership at MOVA. I found it interesting that
7 Councilman Avella discussed that he couldn't get
8 the numbers for the funding when I was able to
9 pull them up on the departmental estimates with no
10 problem. The fact is, the city pays actually less
11 for MOVA than the state does. That's a problem
12 right there. What they pay is minimal. You're
13 talking a \$59 billion budget and we're talking
14 about \$175,000. Let's get real. On the Council
15 side of the house, there are a number of issues
16 that you have to deal with as well. Twice, your
17 predecessor submitted names for the speaker's side
18 of the Veterans Advisory Board. They've gone
19 nowhere. We've had no selections. The mayor's
20 people just basically reappointed the people they
21 had and the Speaker just kind of never appointed.
22 So the people, who wanted, going back to Gifford
23 Miller, just kind of attended the meetings. But
24 they're so intrusive that they get nowhere and
25 half the people don't even really care about the

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2 board anymore. Also, the City Council has
3 recognition ceremonies and celebrations for
4 everything and everyone. We have not had a
5 veterans recognition ceremony since Gifford
6 Miller. There seems to be a lack of respect and a
7 question of what's going on. We're being left
8 behind here. There are a lot of concerns with
9 DHS. Twice we had the deputy commissioner and the
10 commissioner come in and talk before this
11 committee. At one point we had 23 Council Members
12 sign a letter asking them to ask the question are
13 you a veteran in the annual HOPE estimate. They
14 refused to do it. The commissioner's answer at
15 that time, roughly a little over a year ago, was
16 that the caseworkers have handhelds and they'll
17 have the number. There is no number. No one here
18 in this administration, the mayoral administration
19 can give me a number. I can produce three
20 separate numbers from the VA, from DHS, and from
21 the Coalition of the Homeless. The other problem
22 with that is because the city has accepted the
23 VA's notice of availability money, Borden Avenue
24 has shrunk down and you have veterans that are
25 more scattered across the city than ever before.

1
2 It looks like a game of chance. Where are they?
3 Today they're at Bedford and tomorrow they're
4 someplace else. My concern is they're going to
5 come back and we're going to have some legitimate
6 problems with those coming home and those that are
7 still in the system. I just want to reiterate to
8 you that I think there is a level of frustration.
9 We'd like to see you move on some of these issue
10 or you're going to lose people because everybody
11 is going to look at this almost like at the end of
12 Monserrate's time here that people just kind of
13 started fading away because we really weren't
14 getting any of the issues or any of the problems
15 addressed. I look forward to working with you.

16 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: Pardon me.

17 I'm directing that my 3:00 be called to say it's
18 not going to happen. Let me try to address some
19 of these things. I'm in a good position. I'd
20 feel more comfortable on the other side of the
21 table on these issues. I don't have a problem
22 with this. If you know my history, we take on
23 anybody. If they're right we'll stick with them,
24 but if they're wrong we'll take on anybody. Just
25 a little glance at my own history will tell you

1
2 the same. There are issues that are more easily
3 solved at a federal or state level. Whoever pays
4 the majority of the money is who an authority or
5 entity will listen to more. If you don't put
6 anything into their budget they're almost in one
7 sense giving you a courtesy because you can't hurt
8 them. However, we should use every single thing
9 that we have. We should fire every weapon that we
10 have at them. Even 22s in the right hands can do
11 some damage. I'm not opposed to taking on any of
12 these issues as we must. We'll start with the
13 tough one and go on. I have arranged that I'm
14 going to go down with you guys and see for myself
15 and try to hear why three people are being turned
16 down. Now I'm sure they'll have to give me some
17 basic reasons and then there are reasons behind
18 reasons. So we'll see. Our journey together is
19 going to be interesting. It's going to be
20 frustrating. It's going to be a mess. No one
21 person can drain this swamp. I don't care how bad
22 they are or think they are. However, you better
23 think you're bad in order to get into these
24 waters. You're talking big institutions that are
25 set in their ways and have no problems of covering

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2 up for themselves. They have no problems crushing
3 folks. There I go with my own biases. I can't
4 say that stuff. They are bureaucracies and I'm
5 sure they mean well. I'll use that one until I
6 see for myself. So this week I'm going to go down
7 there and with my luck some Marines come in here.
8 Marine Corps is part of the Navy also. I know you
9 all don't claim us. We will get in there. Drag
10 me out in my first week. Could I at least get to
11 my second week? I don't believe we have any more
12 speakers on this issue. You guys have laid it out
13 very well. You know the terrain better than I do.
14 I'm going to look forward to getting your advice.
15 I'm going to need a good compass or two. I only
16 claim to be a dumb jarhead. Dumb enough to not
17 know what's impossible. Dumb enough to take on
18 any and all. Dumb enough to not understand that
19 there may be sacred cows. I look at a sacred cow
20 and I get hungry. I'm crazy enough to get into
21 his stuff. I don't believe in just meeting to
22 talk. I'm not interested in creating a fan club
23 or any of these other things. I think that's very
24 boring. I do believe that we should meet together
25 and get some stuff done. I also don't want to get

1
2 up there and be by myself. If we say we're going
3 to do something let's do it. I'm going to make
4 you very few promises my friends, very few
5 promises. But those that I do make I'm going to
6 try to see through. I'm going to be very hesitant
7 to just speaking fast and saying things. I don't
8 think that's in anyone's interests. I am the type
9 of person that doesn't let go of stuff. If I were
10 a canine, I wouldn't be the smartest, wouldn't be
11 the best looking, and wouldn't be the sleekest or
12 any of that good stuff. I'd be closer to the pit
13 bull. He's not the smartest or the best looking
14 but he has something that makes him what he's
15 known for. When he gets his teeth on something he
16 doesn't let go. That's how I got through college,
17 I didn't let go. That's how I became a
18 Councilperson and that's how I stayed a
19 Councilperson, just wouldn't let go until the deed
20 was done. Elections are nice. God willing I win
21 mine but that's not my fire. My fire is driven
22 more by if you tell me that there's some injustice
23 going on that I can do something about, and then
24 I'm going to try to see it through. Other people
25 kiss babies better than I do. They're better at

1
2 it. I have no problems with that. I love them
3 too, but let them kiss them better. We win our
4 elections by what we do every day. You have given
5 me a charge and you gave a way of seeing whether
6 it's going to happen. It's very easy. If I show
7 up this week then I kept my word. If I don't show
8 up this week then I'm in a bind and I better hope
9 this meeting takes place a couple of months from
10 now. It won't. We're going to meet at least once
11 or twice a month. I believe in regular meetings
12 but I do believe in briefer meetings. Anything
13 that goes more than an hour and a half is really a
14 workshop. A meeting is a little bit shorter.
15 I'll break the rules because I love Black Vets for
16 Social Justice. Sir?

17 ORONDE TAKUMA: Do you have a
18 calendar?

19 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: I will. I
20 absolutely will come up with a calendar, as much
21 of one as we can. The difficulty there is all
22 kinds of stuff happens in the city that can nudge
23 and mess up a calendar. It's nicely written and
24 the next thing you know it's worth nothing. In
25 fact, I'm reminded that the budget is coming up

1
2 and under those conditions all calendars go down
3 the drain. I'll let you get the penultimate word.
4 That's a new one for me. I learned it last week.
5 It means next to last. Yours is the penultimate
6 word.

7 [Pause]

8 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: I'm thinking
9 a Marine would let me run my mouth and I would be
10 able to get out of here without that. Marines are
11 not known for their brilliance. They're not known
12 for many different things. They are known that
13 they will step up on you. They are known for
14 that. However, having said all of those good
15 things my friends and we will say a little bit
16 more at the end of this one I'm sure, I look
17 forward to working with you as we keep our eye on
18 what we're supposed to be doing. There are some
19 folks out there who need an opening. We are
20 blessed to be in a position where we can create an
21 opening. I close with a story that you know well.
22 That story, of course, comes from some of the
23 earliest warriors. I knew this before the movie.
24 The mothers used to tell their men children when
25 they were of age to go to war, and that was

1
2 roughly 13, they would tell them, "come back with
3 your shield or come back on it." By that they
4 meant there will be no cowards here. You can come
5 back a martyr or we prefer for you to come back a
6 hero, but you will come back a warrior. That is
7 my own personal motto. We don't take on too many
8 things but what we do take on we intend by the
9 grace of God and hard work to get to the other
10 side. With your help, God willing I will. This
11 meeting is now adjourned.

C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Donna Hintze certify that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. I further certify that I am not related to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that I am in no way interested in the outcome of this matter.



Signature_____

Date May 4, 2009_____