

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS

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March 28, 2014
Start: 10:30 a.m.
Recess: 11:30 a.m.

HELD AT: Council Chambers
250 Broadway - Hearing Room
16th Fl

B E F O R E: ERIC A. ULRICH
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Paul A. Vallone
Fernando Cabrera
Andrew Cohen
Alan N. Maisel

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Rob Piechota
Director
Small Business Development Center

Avi Duvdevani
Lena Hamanaka
John MacDougal

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COMMITTEE ON VETERANS

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COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Good morning,
everyone.

FEMALE SPEAKER: I'm here.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well, tell me
when you're good.

[Pause]

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: All right, we've
got the thumbs up. Good morning everyone. My name
is Council Member Paul Vallone filling in for our
Chair Ulrich, who is on his way. To my right is
Council Member Andrew Cohen, and today is our
Committee on Veterans. So I will read the statement
that was prepared by our Chair, Council Member Eric
Ulrich. And we'll commence this meeting. [gavel]
Good morning. I'm Council Member Paul Vallone
filling in for the much better looking Eric Ulrich,
Chair of the Council Committee on Veterans.

In February, this committee held a
hearing where we looked at what the City, service
providers, and veterans groups are doing to help
decrease the unemployment rate among our veterans.
SBS came and told us that more that more than 10% of
veterans in New York City are unemployed. Since the
hearing, the United States Department of Labor

1 released new unemployment data showing that the
2 national unemployment rate for recent veterans is up
3 again to over 9%. That just remains unacceptable.
4 While hope that SBS is going to work to improve its
5 services for veterans, I think it's clear that if
6 we're going to solve this problem, we need to work
7 with business owners to get them to start hiring
8 veterans.
9

10 Today, we're hearing a resolution that
11 Mr. Ulrich introduced in support of bills before the
12 State Legislature that would give businesses a strong
13 incentive to bring veterans on as employees. Statute
14 1707 and A.4098 by Senator Mark Grisanti and Assembly
15 Member Fred Thiel, Jr. would offer New York business
16 tax credits of up to \$4,000 for hiring a veteran.

17 The federal government offered a similar
18 benefit for businesses that hire veterans, but they
19 haven't renewed the program for 2014. I think this
20 is the right time for the state to step up and show
21 the rest of the country that we are serious about
22 supporting our veterans and business owners; that
23 potential veterans have as employees. We want to
24 acknowledge our fellow council members of the
25 Veterans Committee for joining us and thank council

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member -- each for singing as a co-sponsor to the Resolution. And now we'll get started with the first panel.

But I think -- Just let me give a couple of the -- the Resolution here is number 143 introduced March 28th today, 2014 by Council Members Ulrich, Barron, Chin, Dickens, Eugene, Gentile, Vallone, and Rose calling upon the New York State Legislature to pass, and the governor to sign Statute 1707 and 4098, which would establish a Veteran's Tax Credit. That's what we're talking about, a Veteran's Tax Credit for businesses, and allow the hire for veterans and disabled veterans.

So our first panel we have Robbie Leashes [phonetic] or Leshes or Robbie. John McDougal, Robert Piechota [phonetic] Picota, Robert. Sorry, Robert. Lionel Hamanaka [phonetic]. Lionel. That's four gentlemen.

[Pause]

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Good morning, everyone. Who would like to start? All right.

[Pause]

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Yes, please introduce them, if you can.

1 ROB PIECHOTA: Yes. Good morning,
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3 Council Member Vallone, my name is Rob Piechota. I'm
4 the Small Business Development Center Director in
5 Brooklyn. Formerly I was the Veteran Advisor for
6 Small Business Development Center for all boroughs.
7 So I prepared a statement, but I've given copies to
8 everybody involved. Again, Mr. Cohen, Mr. Vallone,
9 thanks for facilitating this. Thanks for your
10 interest.

11 As the Director of the Small Business
12 Development Center we -- I'm not going to read this
13 verbatim. I'll spare you the lengthy narrative, but
14 the bottom line is we know veterans. We've been
15 doing this for about five years now with specifically
16 veterans involving business. And I'll make the
17 connection here briefly to the topic at hand.
18 Probably 90% of all veterans I did see during my
19 stint as exclusively the Veteran Director, 90% of the
20 veterans I saw were not really ready to start their
21 own business.

22 A number of issues. Credit issues, and
23 capital necessary to start their business, et cetera.
24 So 90% of the veterans that I saw went straight into
25 the business world as employees. They were looking

1 for work, and we facilitated that role in the past.
2 So we worked a lot with the veterans who were looking
3 for employment, as well as small business owners who
4 want to hire veterans.
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6 So we know the space. We know in the
7 city specifically. I included a number of data
8 sheets from a number of sources. Part of the SBBC
9 value proposition is we have people up in Albany who
10 could actually run data for us targeting specific
11 issues. We have a form that gives you a breakdown by
12 borough of your -- some of the demographics, the
13 unemployment status et cetera. And also, a rough
14 idea of the number of veterans that -- Veteran owned
15 businesses exclusively, and businesses that have
16 equal share ownership of veterans and non-veterans.
17 So you have like some kind of snapshot of the number
18 of businesses that are employing veterans right now.

19 Also, New York State as a whole. Ninety-
20 nine percent of all jobs in the State of New York
21 come from small businesses. So it's no stretch that
22 this is a high impact topic we're talking about New
23 York State -- I looked at this script and I missed
24 one. New York State ranks third amongst all states
25 in the U.S. in terms of U.S. veteran population. We

1 got a lot of veterans here in this state, folks.
2 Yet, we have unacceptable levels of unemployment.
3 According to one source that you have in front of
4 you, it's a 2008 to 2012 five-year estimate.
5

6 It seems -- obviously, intuitive to a
7 casual observer that there's immediately available
8 labor force that are considered to be trainable, and
9 proven not only in leadership, but also in
10 followship. It's basic. Veterans know how to follow
11 orders, and they're great employees. We have small
12 businesses in New York that could benefit greatly
13 from the economic stimulus in any tax incentive. Not
14 the least of which deals with the quality and talent
15 labor force that has spent so many years of their
16 youth defending their country.

17 I'm very happy to be here today with a
18 colleague of mine from our home base in Brooklyn.
19 We're working very closely with the Brooklyn Chamber
20 of Commerce in addressing a number of the gaps that
21 the veterans are facing when it comes to employment,
22 social issues, as well as how to get into the
23 procurement game, and how to get certified as a
24 certified veteran owned or services as a veteran in a
25 small business.

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2 A number of key issues that this task
3 force we're working jointly on to try to alleviate
4 some of these issues. The Resolution at hand is a
5 great idea. It brings two key obvious issues going
6 on, and really the large-scale workforce that is
7 unemployed that should not be in no way, shape, or
8 form. And also, you have employers who are looking
9 for high quality labor.

10 Before any of this actually started, the
11 Brooklyn Chamber and I were actually working on sort
12 of a plan on how do we educate our employers on how
13 the best way they can sort of capitalize on the
14 available workforce that is represented by the
15 veterans. This particular initiative would be ideal.
16 If we can incentivize some of these small business
17 owners to overcome some of the challenges to do
18 business -- Let's face it, New York is a tremendous
19 marketplace. People want to live here. People want
20 to open up businesses here, but it's not cheap. Any
21 kind of incentive that can make some of these
22 obstacles more navigable would be ideal. So at this
23 point, I'd like to turn it over to Avi, who is --
24 really taking the bull by the horns with the Chamber
25 of Commerce Brooklyn in trying to look at some

2 business issues. Before I turn it over, any
3 questions that immediately come to mind?

4 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well, we
5 appreciate the experience and the knowledge. And I
6 think with new administration, and pretty much I'm
7 pretty excited, a new Council, I would not
8 underestimate the ability to bring forth the
9 knowledge that you have. I think this is one of the
10 areas that we were talking amongst ourselves if there
11 are ideas that didn't go forward in the past.

12 I think everything should be looked at,
13 and I think looking at the Brooklyn Chamber of
14 Commerce. But that's one. I'd like to see the other
15 boroughs here. I'd liked to talk about tonight and
16 go into a veterans group and district. And ours is
17 our Councilman he's in New York constantly talking
18 about how we can do more. So even though we just
19 have per se it was one resolution on the table.

20 I think we should take advantage of the
21 ideas and these types of forums so we can as council
22 members take them back to our fellow 51 council
23 members, to our speaker, to our mayor, to our
24 veterans group. And like you say the statistics with
25 small business, this is the only way it's going to

2 happen. So how we can better facilitate enforce
3 those ideas with small business. You had just
4 started I think to kind of touch base on this is one
5 idea with increasing the tax credit.

6 But what do you think is the greatest
7 hindrance at this point? Is it the awareness to the
8 employers of how to take these steps? Is it the lack
9 of knowledge on the veteran's side as they're
10 returning, or if they've been for years to reach to
11 the small businesses that are willing to employ?
12 Where should we tackle first?

13 ROBERT PIECHOTA: I think you just touched
14 on that, Mr. Piechota, thank you. First of all, I
15 don't want to suggest that other boroughs are not
16 doing anything? Avi and I have spent a number of
17 hours talking about how do we make things happen? We
18 have no problem being the leadership or the lead team
19 on these issues. If it works in Brooklyn, others can
20 certainly get those practices, and we can roll this
21 out across the entire city, which would be fantastic.
22 There are veterans peppered all throughout the city.
23 Why are things not moving along smoothly?

24 Again, I'm not sure if anybody is aware,
25 but we're the third or fourth most populated state I

1 know of in the country as far as veterans. Yet, we
2 have no state initiative that actually promotes
3 procurement benefits for veterans. Like 40 -- 44 or
4 46 states actually have programs in place to sort of
5 promote veterans opening up their own business and
6 getting involved with procurement either at a city
7 level or a state level. New York does not have any.

8 I'm not being a bit horsey. The point is
9 opportunity is there to excel, but one is education?
10 And number two, that's one of the points of our plan.
11 I don't want to take over from you, but Avi's got a -
12 - Let's face it, there's a membership based
13 organization. They have folks that want to hire
14 veterans, and part of our plan is to educate the
15 employers on how to do it. If this thing does get
16 actually acceptance at the state level, we will be
17 happy to roll out the how-tos.

18 One experience I had doing this at a
19 state level before I got to Brooklyn was if you asked
20 a particular employer, Why are you not taking
21 advantage of the incentives right now to hire a
22 veteran? You have -- and the employer told me, Well,
23 I got to hire a person just to handle the
24 administration of it. It is -- I mean, I guess once
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2 you get it down, it's a little bit easier, but it is
3 overwhelming. I'll take anything. I'll take a
4 complex one right now, but whatever we do, if we can
5 make it streamlined, it would be unbelievable. I
6 don't care if --

7 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Okay. I think
8 that would be where we could between you and the
9 small business employer to eliminate or reduce that
10 paperwork and that streamline. Because as a fellow
11 small businessman myself, it's true I don't have an
12 extra five, ten, fifteen minutes let alone to respond
13 to my wife's call for milk let alone getting -- going
14 through new programs. By the way, we've been joined
15 by Councilman Alan Maisel, and I seen Council Member
16 Chukka coming in also and we appreciate that. Yes, I
17 know you wanted to turn it over to Avi. So Avi.

18 AVI DUVDEVANI: Just to give you guys a
19 bit of background, as Rob said, you know, the
20 Brooklyn Chamber is a membership-based organization.
21 We have today about 1,600 members. And one of the
22 things we've been looking at is the last few is that
23 what is -- what is the Chamber doing for the veteran
24 community? And we realized there's nothing really
25 done. So one of the things we worked for to start

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2 with we put a task force together. The task force is
3 really comprised of non-profit groups, for-profit
4 groups, elected officials all to come to the table
5 and say, Okay, what are we doing to help veterans.

6 Like just to give you guys a statement,
7 you know, we have the Brooklyn Borough President's
8 Office. We have Operation Wellness Warrior, the
9 David Lynch Foundation and Hope for the Warriors, the
10 Brooklyn Bridge Rotary Club. We have everybody. We
11 have everybody. We have even from banks at the
12 table, and just last week we had -- this past Tuesday
13 at our last meeting we had someone from the General's
14 Office come down to send a representative to be
15 engaged as well, of what they're doing and what they
16 can help facilitate on a federal level.

17 And one of the things we like as Bob said
18 is a lot of business, but they're not ready for it.
19 And one of the things we're going to be advocating is
20 to really take them by the hand, and walk them
21 through the process of how to start a business, how
22 to become business ready. Because a lot of veterans
23 think that they have it, but they don't -- they
24 realize they don't, and they get past on from agency
25 to agency, and they get very frustrated and very

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2 overwhelmed. And they just say they're not interested
3 and they back off. In addition to that, a lot of
4 them go job fairs. And to go to a job fair, it costs
5 to go to a job fair. So they go from job to job, but
6 they don't get hired, and they're just -- they're not
7 going back.

8 So just having an estimate into the TAP
9 Program, which is the program when they get back to
10 stateside, they educate them about what's available
11 once you get back home. They get thrown so much
12 information that they don't even know where to turn.
13 And they only realize when they're at the end of the
14 line as Jordan's said, Their last resort, that they
15 turn to them and say, Where do we go? How do we go
16 about it?

17 And Jordan's office is only able to
18 really help them with benefits and dealing with the
19 DA, but other than that they don't do that. And this
20 is where we fit. This is a void that can be filled
21 is by bringing all these groups together. Instead of
22 working in silos and kind of recreating every single
23 time, to really talk to one another what each other
24 is doing and what your specialty is for the veteran
25 space. Then creating a fact sheet that can be shared

2 with every single group by saying this person does
3 housing, this person does job retention and job
4 employment.

5 This person helps businesses with OJT.
6 You know, why would you train a veteran to get OJT
7 programs? This is something to help you with a tax
8 credit. All these different things so that the
9 people who are now looking to hire the veteran, we
10 ask the veteran to go into an interview and say,
11 Look, this is what I can bring to your business.
12 This is one of the things we've been trying to
13 promote going forward.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: The task force
15 you mentioned is it just Brooklyn at this point?

16 AVI DUVDEVANI: Well, we have people all
17 across the city, but it is based in Brooklyn only
18 because the members we are dealing with are Brooklyn
19 based. But we're looking to create this other pilot
20 program to really roll this out if possible city and
21 nationwide.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well, I think
23 we'd all be a big fan of that. I need to cut you
24 off.

25 AVI DUVDEVANI: Right.

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COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: I think that's probably speaking for Queens something that we need. I know our new borough President is looking to do just that. So now might be the perfect time.

AVI DUVDEVANI: And we're more than happy to share any information in how we go about it. There's not like secretive.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Okay. Fellow Councilmen, are there any questions.

COUNCIL MEMBER: Are you going to...

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: No, we're going to keep it with this panel for a while.

COUNCIL MEMBER: I have a question.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Yes, sir.

[Pause]

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Just flip your mic on.

COUNCIL MEMBER: In the Brooklyn Chamber testimony, you say you're calling on the governor to sign it. But it's my understanding the bill didn't pass yet.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Right.

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COUNCIL MEMBER: Okay, but in your testimony it says just that the governor should sign it.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: We're in support of it.

COUNCIL MEMBER: Yeah. Okay, so am I. Okay.

AVI DUVDEVANI: One of the things that we want also, and listening to Ray talking about it, and me and Robert have been talking and the group itself has been mentioning is about a procurement opportunity on a city level. You know, we have now the governor just passed with the State and the State Senate, they just passed a procurement opportunity for disabled veterans on the State level.

There is nothing currently done on the City level. And one of the things they're trying to do is promote a procurement opportunity on a City level. But instead of getting certified through a City agency, which would just create more bureaucracy, the SBBC they help veterans get certified as a veteran owned business the BA.

So why don't we take a certification that veterans get from the BA, as recognized certification

1 process to do procurement with the City. I know that
2 the last City Council has asked SBS to do a study on.
3 And SBS presented at the last meeting saying that
4 they're not going to have the metrics and the data
5 until December. But I do feel to maybe roll out a
6 pilot program. Something very small just to see how
7 it runs. I think this could be a really big game
8 changer for the veteran community in the same city.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well, these are
11 exactly the ideas that we're looking for, and I think
12 with the energy of the group that's here, that wants
13 to be on this committee, this is what we have here I
14 realize that some of this are new councilmen. And
15 that's why I say we like to hear from them sometimes
16 from the beginning from chapter one so that we can
17 tackle these things. I think we all look at it, and
18 we should look at it short term and long term. So,
19 short term what you're doing is exactly, and not to
20 let those results linger. However, our Chair has just
21 walked in. So we're trying to sell it to our
22 chairman Eric Ulrich.

23 CHAIRMAN ULRICH: Meet Mr. Vallone.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: And, please,
25 keep -- continue with that.

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COUNCIL MEMBER: Just a - you're --
you're giving your opinion from your side. I can
tell you as an observer and one of this group, it's
exciting to see the interest level in the Chair's
field on that side of the table, too. We're very
excited about your interest and motivation.

LENA HAMANAKA: Good morning. My name is
I'm Lena Hamanaka[phonetic], and I'd like to thank
Chair Ulrich, number one, and the other members for
having this Resolution 143. My name is Lena
Hamanaka, and I'm a member of Military Families Speak
Out, which was a national group that families related
to soldiers serving after 9/11. And we were opposed
to the War in Afghanistan and Iraq.

I wrote a support statement. I'd like to
appeal to all the legislators in Albany like the
senators and assemblymen and women to please pass
this -- these laws because the veteran community is
suffering from high unemployment. As you know, it
requires a nexus of support for any individual to
succeed, and one of the main pieces of this is having
a job.

So that they can successfully transfer
from military life to civilian life. Right now, the

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burden of supporting veterans who are unemployed, and dealing with the psychological and other effects of first-time military families. It's a very expensive, costly, and we're going to be doing this the rest of our lives. All the disabled veterans a lot of their parents are getting 24-hour care.

So it's a very serious commitment on the part of military families, not to speak of the effect of PTSD or traumatic brain injury. Those veterans who can work really want to work. But the problem is that their skills in the military unless -- the skills that they have are not obvious to employers. So there needs to be set in motion some kind of expert who can who can -- in the City Administration -- who can look at, Well what did you do?

I was a gunner in the artillery squad. Well, obviously, you're not going to do that in civilian life. But what other things did you do? Try to help them transfer the skills that they acquired aside from the obvious ones of integrity, courage, commitment, intelligence, and the ability to work on a team or direct a team. That employers can use and see as applicable to their job category.

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2 That's really, really important because
3 on both sides of the equation the employer and the
4 veteran do not know exactly how to match people up
5 with opportunities. It's one thing to have a million
6 dollars; you go out and buy a house. It's another
7 thing to have a set of qualifications that people
8 can't translate. So there needs to be a translation
9 from military life to civilian life. And, I don't
10 believe the 90% figure is accurate because I think --
11 I don't know whether or not -- There's a lot of
12 veterans.

13 I think there's 1,900 in SUNY who are
14 student, and they may be working as work/study
15 people. They maybe count as employed. I mean I've
16 heard of a lot of extreme cases of women living in
17 the woods with their kids because they don't want to
18 live in the city shelters. I'm sure that they would
19 be happy to work, if they have the opportunity. So
20 there needs to be more outreach to people on the
21 level of going -- I knew a veteran from the Gulf War
22 who was going out in the middle of the night with a
23 bunch of people, and he worked for the City.

24 And he was just in general, the homeless,
25 you know, helping them, reaching out to them, and

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trying to get them services. I think that kind of thing has to happen with the veteran population, too. I don't think that what we have now is we have veteran fairs for jobs. And then well-intentioned non-profits go there looking for veterans to sign up to their programs. But it usually doesn't work because they don't follow up.

You have a person there with a lot of problems. They need to be individually counseled. They may not want to travel two hours to your office. We need to put someone on site in these various places. I was up in Bronx Community College at a job fair. A woman came by. She's got her parent to deal with who's not functioning well. She has a brother who doesn't contribute to the household. She has a student loan. She has PTSD. She wakes up in the morning, and she's scared.

Obviously, this person needs a bridge to walk over, somebody to follow up, and make sure that that case is completed; not just started. Okay, because sometimes non-profits only look to begin a case, and then you get statistics that are misleading. Okay, there are liaison people supposedly in every city agency that were appointed

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by Mayor Bloomberg. But if you call a City agency and ask who that liaison person is who are supposed to help veterans, they don't even know themselves. I went through this with a department -- the shelter system. Called around all over. They couldn't figure it out. Now, obviously if somebody knows this fact, there's already a network set up. Now, just continue that network and use it for the benefit for veterans. So that at least some of them can get placed working for the City. That would help a lot, you know.

On the level of vending, which is most veterans that like to start their own business, don't have money. So they want like to have a vendor's license. Okay, that there is this big furor, and there's a history of vendors in this -- in the city who are trying to get licenses, but they need someone to walk them through the process.

And it's been like some of them have been working for this committee for like 20 years, and they're still complaining about it that they don't have enough access. So whatever happened to the prior administration to help these veterans get a -- actually get a license, it should be increased

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2 because a lot of times veterans want to work by
3 themselves.

4 They need to have PTSD or something, and
5 have to go to the doctor. So they want to have the
6 kind of job where they don't have to necessarily
7 report everyday. If they're a vendor, it doesn't
8 cost that much money to get started, and they can
9 actually earn some income and they like being
10 independent.

11 [Pause]

12 LENA HAMANAKA: I would just call upon
13 the legislature again. If you are patriotic, if you
14 believe in national defense, if you want to have a
15 military service in the future that is strong,
16 because I'll tell you, most veterans -- Bill Dobb was
17 in the service, too. Your grandpa was in the service,
18 too. If we fail at this point to help the veterans
19 that have just served, there's going to be a bad rate
20 on the street. We have to come through for the
21 people who came through for us.

22 [Pause]

23 JOHN MAC DOUGAL: My name is John
24 MacDougal [phonetic], and I serve many of the
25 Military Families Speak Out, and I'm also a veteran

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2 myself and a member of a couple of veterans
3 organizations. I apologize but I was recently
4 recruited into this event today, and I didn't know it
5 called for a prepared speech. So I will be very
6 brief.

7 In listening to all of this and from my
8 own experience and listening to what's going on in
9 our society, this is a really an important issue.
10 But it's also a tip of an iceberg as to the basic
11 underlying problems in our society, in our country
12 with our beliefs and everything else. And I just
13 feel that we're just rapidly losing democracy, and
14 our concepts of we like to believe with the America
15 idea, the ideal American situation of looking out for
16 our fellow man, and peace and justice, and fair play
17 and all of that. It's just everybody is out for the
18 buck, and until some of these things are cured a lot
19 of these things maybe won't get done. And that's the
20 end of my talk.

21 [Pause]

22 CHAIRMAN ULRICH: Okay, thank you for
23 your testimony. I first want to begin by apologizing
24 to you, the people who came here to testify that we
25 had to begin a little late and that I was not here to

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2 open the meeting. I want to apologize to my
3 colleagues. I meant no disrespect to waste their
4 time. I know they have other obligations both here
5 and in their districts. So I want to thank my
6 colleague, Paul Vallone, for opening the meeting for
7 me, and I was very happy to relieve him of his
8 command when I got here today.

9 But this is a very important issue
10 regarding providing tax incentives for businesses who
11 hired veterans or disabled veterans, the former
12 service members. I was watching last night or the
13 night before the New York State channel. I know
14 there's a new senator he can -- Is he here? I don't
15 know that.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER: [off mic]

17 CHAIRMAN ULRICH: There's a -- what
18 channel is that on, though?

19 COUNCIL MEMBER: [off mic]

20 CHAIRMAN ULRICH: I was watching it late
21 at night. When you can't sleep, it helps you.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER [off mic]

23 CHAIRMAN ULRICH: I know, and my
24 colleague Allen Mizelzer [phonetic] may. He was in
25 the Assembly so he could attest to that, but I was at

2 -- I happened to turn it on when the State Senate was
3 in session, and they -- I believe they were live.
4 And Senator Ball was talking about his bill that they
5 were passing, and how they were able to do it with
6 bi-partisan support in the chamber, which doesn't
7 always happen on every bill. But any time that we
8 can pass legislation that is going to help veterans
9 get jobs and transition into civilian life, it's a
10 good thing. When I first got here, Paul mentioned
11 that a statistic was mentioned earlier. I don't know
12 about him, but that 44 states have procurement. Is
13 that in your testimony? Can you just touch on that
14 for a second.

15 ROBERT PIECHOTA: Yes, sir, again.

16 CHAIRMAN ULRICH: New York does not.

17 ROBERT PIECHOTA: I'm Rob, by the way,
18 just to remind them, and a small business vendor,
19 sir. But the fact is we're like the third or fourth
20 most populated state in the country as far as veteran
21 population. Yet, there 44 other states that have
22 some kind of set-aside just for veteran entrepreneurs
23 in the procurement space. New York should be a
24 leader. It's not. We don't have anything either at
25 a state level or at City level. And given the robust

2 number of veterans, we do, in fact, have, and the
3 dedicated community service like you all, that's
4 something we can change.

5 CHAIRMAN ULRICH: Sir, maybe if you can't
6 answer this question, perhaps the Committee Council.
7 I want to thank her too, Kelly Taylor [sic], can
8 speak to this. But what is the difference between the
9 bill that passed in the State Senate just the other
10 night, and the two bills that we're urging the
11 legislature to pass today? Is there -- what's the
12 main difference?

13 FEMALE SPEAKER: I don't know on the
14 bill.

15 CHAIRMAN ULRICH: So the one --

16 FEMALE SPEAKER: [off mic]

17 CHAIRMAN ULRICH: Sot the one that passed
18 was the - -

19 FEMALE SPEAKER: Contracts.

20 CHAIRMAN ULRICH: Was the contracts and
21 the procurement, and having to do with the women and
22 minority owned businesses. In fact, as a lot of
23 people state, it's going to help women and minority
24 owned businesses because a lot of them happen to be
25 veterans. So it doesn't discriminate or take away

2 from that in any way. But this is regarding tax
3 incentives, and in some of the other states that
4 you're familiar with, what do some of those tax
5 incentives look like? And give me a very basic
6 example, if you can. Do you know?

7 [Pause]

8 CHAIRMAN ULRICH: Perhaps. Yeah.

9 AVI DUVDEVANI: Some things we've been
10 hearing from our businesses that have now come from
11 out of state or now moved to Brooklyn is that they
12 said that when they moved to any particular city, say
13 for example, Charlotte, North Carolina, the chamber
14 there has somebody on staff who helps educate the
15 business. And saying to them, If you're going to
16 hire a veteran, these are the benefits you'll get
17 from the state, the city, and the federal government.

18 So it makes the business more
19 incentivized and it helps them work through the
20 process to really take advantage of those incentives.
21 In addition, what they do is a lot of times in most
22 local municipalities they don't recreate the wheel.
23 So if a veteran is certified as the veteran-owned
24 business or veteran disability owned business through
25 the VA, they basically use that certification as

1
2 template to say, Okay, we're going to allow you to be
3 certified with the city. So they would basically try
4 to minimize the way of making the veterans fill out
5 more paperwork and more processes. And that's very
6 innervating to them as it is.

7 CHAIRMAN ULRICH: Well, I had a few other
8 questions, but I'd like to defer to my colleague,
9 Council Member Cohen, who I know has a few questions
10 for the panel.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Good morning.
12 Thank you for testifying. I appreciate it. Can you
13 just articulate some of the specific obstacles that
14 veterans -- I mean this is giving incentive to
15 employers, but what are the specific obstacles that
16 veterans face that you think that this incentive will
17 address?

18 AVI DUVDEVANI: Some things we will see
19 is that when a veteran goes in for a job, they don't
20 really express that there's a tax credit available
21 from the federal government. They don't realize that
22 they can sell those tax credits instead of skills
23 that they could really market themselves to really be
24 more competitive either -- versus other employees who
25 are trying to get a job.

1
2 And a lot of businesses don't want to
3 hire a veteran because they don't know that there's
4 an incentive for it. So I think it's a really two-
5 prong approach. The businesses don't understand
6 themselves how they could help reduce their bottom or
7 increase the bottom line by hiring a veteran, by
8 getting all these different incentives. And for the
9 veterans themselves to know how to market themselves.

10 Because veterans, you know, they just --
11 they come home, they're stateside, they're just like
12 every other individual. But really, they're not
13 because they have a different set of skills that the
14 military has given them that makes them more
15 attractive to be hired. And I think that's what
16 we're trying to do is help the veterans understand
17 that, that we want to interview how to translate your
18 skills into skills that can be replicated through the
19 business so they can understand it. And also have
20 the business understand how to take advantage of
21 these incentives.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Do you have any
23 idea what this tax incentive would cost the State?

24 AVI DUVDEVANI: No.
25

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: You all talked
3 about process. I mean I wonder if there is a better
4 -- I mean, is there a better way maybe to allocate
5 resources in terms of the maybe educating veterans on
6 how to go to an interview, or - -

7 ROBERT PIECHOTA: That's a great
8 question, sir. There are a number of different
9 agencies from the VA down to a number of non-profits.
10 There are some doc coms on line that offer services
11 for a fee on how to help veterans market themselves.
12 It's very decentralized. There is no go-to staff,
13 and that's one of the reasons why thanks to Avi's
14 help with the Chamber, if we can make some kind of
15 member based organization to be sort of the flagship,
16 right.

17 If you have a need, go here and we'll
18 sort of refer you out and walk you over to the right
19 place to do just what you're saying. It's amazing.
20 Everybody I ever talked to who wanted to open up
21 their own business, they had no idea if they were not
22 prepared yet for the business venture, and they
23 didn't know how to market themselves. And it's hard.
24 As our colleague said, if you attack them it's hard
25

2 to translate that into a marketable skill to somebody
3 who has a packaging plan.

4 I came out of West Point, and you know, I
5 had a hard time when I left the Military Police
6 telling people I was a Special Security Officer. How
7 does that translate to an employer? It's you have to
8 have a better education system where we actually
9 through our initiative perhaps just educate a set
10 number of employees. Actually, capture that to see
11 what kind of metrics we can prove.

12 But unfortunately, if a veteran left to
13 their own devices goes on the Internet, it would take
14 probably hours to figure out exactly what kind of
15 information they're talking about. How do you market
16 yourself? And these folks are proven workers, proven
17 followers, and proven leaders. It's just hard to
18 articulate that when you were a special weapons
19 officer or you were a mechanic.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Do you know if a
21 veteran started their own business would they be
22 eligible for this tax credit?

23 [Pause]

24 ROBERT PIECHOTA: Absolutely. If they
25 start their own business, they're privy to the same

2 tax credits as everybody else. Absolutely. And
3 actually, it's a proven number. I think veteran-
4 owned businesses are seven times more likely to hire
5 a veteran. What's that?

6 AVI DUVDEVANI: **Emphasis C [INDAUDIBLE**
7 **00:37:07]**

8 ROBERT PIECHOTA: Emphasis C. So I mean
9 it's sort of a self-fulfilling prophesy. It's
10 actually motion machine.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: And my thought,
12 which I guess well I'll just continue, but I guess
13 there are veterans who are very successful in the
14 workplace and there are veterans who struggle, but
15 the business would get a tax credit regardless of
16 whether the veteran was highly employable or
17 struggling, is that correct?

18 AVI DUVDEVANI: From what I understand
19 it's the incentive that if you hire the veteran. So
20 it doesn't make a difference if the guy is really
21 skilled or he's only in it for a few months and then
22 you -- he gets fired. But I think it's a stipulation
23 that you have him, you get the incentive.

24 ROBERT PIECHOTA: I believe that in the
25 states where it's been successful there is retention

1 factor. Obviously, you cannot claim a tax benefit if
2 you have a person for 30 days. So there is some
3 success metric that has to go along with it. And
4 it's not to say that every single veteran is the
5 ideal employee. Let's face it, over the -- the
6 different ears have different kind of success ratios.
7 Let's face it, someone who is a Vietnam Ear veteran
8 myself, if they're looking for a job now clearly some
9 -- there might be some issues that we don't know,
10 that do not meet the naked eye. But for the most
11 part, with the proper counseling, all these folks are
12 highly welcoming.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Thank you. I
15 appreciate your time.

16 CHAIRMAN ULRICH: Thank you, Council
17 Member Cohen. Are there any other financial
18 incentives other than tax credits that the State or
19 the City could offer employers to hire veterans? Are
20 there any other currently?

21 AVI DUVDEVANI: I know there's the OGT
22 Program. So a lot of the businesses will leap on
23 this. Any new business that is part of joining the
24 Chamber, we ask them two questions. One, are you
25 veteran-owned business? So we could capture that

1 data? Two, are you looking to hire a veteran? So
2 that we have that information handy. So that when we
3 go out we can really give it. And a lot of business
4 said that sometimes they want to hire someone, but
5 they're not at a stage where they want to. Let's say
6 a highly skilled position where they're going to
7 train someone, so that often when the OGT Program or
8 there's a city -- currently a city exiting program
9 where we could have them take advantage of that,
10 train the person. Then they it works -- it was to
11 the present. And that I think if we can market that,
12 expand that program for veterans, then it could be
13 another way to incentivize business to not only train
14 them but also retain them.

16 CHAIRMAN ULRICH: I know that the
17 Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce, which you, of course,
18 represent really is leading the way in helping
19 veterans gain employment. I wish that some of the
20 other chambers would follow the lead that you have,
21 and the example that you've set. You bring up a very
22 important point about actually asking the question.
23 Are you a veteran or have you served in the military,
24 or however you decide to phrase that.

1
2 Because that data, that information is
3 not readily available. Unless you ask for it, you
4 are not going to get it. I think we've had this
5 conversation before about how veterans stopped
6 identifying themselves when they are no longer in
7 military service and they transition into civilian
8 life or trying to, that they don't work under the
9 signing say, I was in Vietnam or I was in Iraq, or I
10 was in Afghanistan. That's not to say that playing
11 down the service -- we're not proud of it. It's to
12 say that, you know, if someone is easily accessible.
13 I'll give you a very good example.

14 I am in the process of planning a job
15 fair in my district for veterans now. And we're
16 going to have lots of big and small employers, local
17 people. And I contacted the VA and met with them,
18 and other people. They're very nice. And I put in a
19 FOIL request, and I asked for the names and addresses
20 of veterans who obviously had had some dealing with
21 the DA, who lived in these zip codes, in the zip
22 codes in my districts.

23 So I was asking in my official capacity
24 as the Chairman of the Veteran's Committee for the
25 stated purpose of only mailing to those individuals,

1 a flyer information letting them know that we were
2 going to have this job fair exclusively for veterans.
3 And not sharing that list with anybody else, and that
4 request was denied by the federal government. And I
5 was very perplexed as to why because it can only help
6 veterans, link them with employers who want to hire
7 veterans, and it really doesn't make sense. Now where
8 else can I get that information? I can't.

10 AVI DUVDEVANI: That's a tough challenge
11 because one of the people on our panel is a young guy
12 named Jeremy Macool [phonetic] from Team HIGO, who is
13 part of the incubate at Polytech. And he was saying
14 to us that a lot of young veterans coming back today
15 from Iraq and Afghanistan do not even identify. They
16 won't even go to the VA.

17 CHAIRMAN ULRICH: Correct.

18 AVI DUVDEVANI: So they're not even
19 listed anywhere. So the only way to really break
20 into those networks is to really go -- hit the ground
21 running by doing outreach in these communities where
22 we're located in Brooklyn to try to really work with
23 our community partners, and know who those are.

24 CHAIRMAN ULRICH: [interposing] We are.
25 we are going to engage veteran organizations and the

2 post. We are going to put out advertising in local
3 papers. We're going to put it on Facebook and social
4 media. We are going to send it out email. We are
5 going to get the word out as best as we can. But I
6 thought for sure that there are Vietnam veterans who
7 are not on Facebook everyday, who don't read the
8 Queens Chronicle every week, who may have been
9 unemployed for the past ten months. But get a job
10 now and went to India, or went to South America.

11 Because the job that they've had for the
12 past 20 or 30 years no longer exists in this country.
13 And how do they market themselves? How do they find
14 a job in today's economy? Those are the people that
15 we're trying to target, too, people who are later on
16 in life who are unemployed and who are not as easily,
17 you know, finding a job. And as you pointed out,
18 rightly so, there are a lot of young people who don't
19 go to the VA. They don't need benefits. So if they
20 need them, they're not asking for them.

21 And so, even the VA won't have their name
22 and address, which makes it difficult. You want to
23 add that.

24 LENA HAMANAKA: No, I just want to say
25 I've been coming to these hearings for a few years

1
2 now listening to Terrance Holliday who is MOVA, the
3 head of my MOVA, is he still the head of MOVA?

4 CHAIRMAN ULRICH: He is, Yes.

5 LENA HAMANAKA: Okay. So he finds out
6 when the troops are coming back, and goes to the
7 airport to meet them. So if you have like some kind
8 of job outreach thing, maybe you could ask him to
9 tell you when these things are.

10 CHAIRMAN ULRICH: Yeah. No, we work very
11 closely.

12 LENA HAMANAKA: Instead of asking the
13 federal government, just ask Terrance Holliday. But
14 also, I think that I'd like to support you in your
15 statement that everybody is doing their own thing
16 among the non-profits. What we really need is like a
17 central citywide sort of nexus thing where people
18 could hook up to, and find out what the successes are
19 or mistakes. Learning from those mistakes and learn
20 from the successes.

21 I mean it would be a voluntary thing, and
22 maybe one of those people that was appointed by Mary
23 Bloomberg to serve as the liaison for Veterans
24 Affairs or someone in the City Administration that
25 you could appoint could have these meetings or

2 something. Because really they -- everybody is doing
3 their own thing, and kind of like some kind -- people
4 are competitive. They don't want to share
5 information. So that sort of makes it kind of
6 confusing for people who are coming back. Maybe
7 you're going to the wrong place, you know.

8 CHAIRMAN ULRICH: Yeah, that definitely
9 seems to be sort of an issue. There are a lot of
10 wonderful veteran service organizations, and groups
11 that are helping veterans everyday. I know that
12 today we are dropping off -- Did we drop it off yet?
13 We have suits and clothes of mine that no longer fit
14 me because I lost about 20 pounds, and I'm giving it
15 to -- What's the name of the group, Rudy? He's
16 going to look it up now, but we met with a veterans
17 group in Manhattan.

18 They're having a big drive tomorrow to
19 collect food and clothes. Not food, but clothing and
20 supplies for homeless vets primarily. I think it's
21 United War Veterans Council. I think it's -- he's
22 going to look it up now, but if any of you have stuff
23 you want to donate, bring it down. Because they --
24 it is right? The United War Veterans Council
25 tomorrow, Saturday, March 29th. They're having a

2 clothing drive. They don't want -- they don't want
3 people's rags.

4 They want nice clothes, real clothes that
5 they can give to people that they can use. You know,
6 some of these veterans that come out of the shelter
7 system that go on a job interview, they don't have a
8 suit. They can't afford to go to Men's Warehouse
9 like I can or you can and buy a hundred dollar shirt.
10 You know, but we had it all dry cleaned and we're
11 bringing it to them today because I can't go
12 tomorrow.

13 But, you know, that's something that I
14 think is worthwhile. But they're one of the groups
15 that are doing a lot of good work, but they're kind
16 of out there doing it on their own. You're out there
17 in the chamber doing it on your own. You're out
18 there doing it on your own. There really is no glue
19 that's holding everything together. Did you want to
20 answer that?

21 JOHN MAC DOUGAL: Yes, I believe -- this
22 is in follow up. I believe there's another aspect
23 that we address of the picture or the puzzle in it.
24 And that's the issue of why some employers are
25 reluctant to hire -- Excuse my voice.

2 CHAIRMAN ULRICH: That's from years ago.

3 JOHN MAC DOUGAL: Why employers are
4 reluctant to hire veterans. I mean some of them have
5 valid reasons, but some don't, and I've been
6 intimidated by them, by their fear -- by their fear.
7 And the fact that weren't a veteran, that is some of
8 the adversarial stuff. And, you know, there's a
9 psychological thing to all of this. It's the same
10 thing as the person who is concerned about hiring a
11 person who has better qualifications than themselves
12 in certain issues, but it's a similar thing.

13 CHAIRMAN ULRICH: But I mean --

14 JOHN MACDOUGAL: But similar along the
15 line as part of this.

16 CHAIRMAN ULRICH: Well, those are
17 definitely some of the obstacles to employment. Do
18 you want to close up the group.

19 ROBERT PIECHOTA: Very briefly. Your
20 challenge about trying to find suitable people to get
21 the message out to. As you get familiarity with the
22 veteran space, there are some go-to organizations,
23 I'm sure you've feel in a similar way. We have our
24 database that we can actually deal with the
25 confidentiality issues, unless that person signs a

1
2 release. If we didn't ask them three years ago, I'm
3 not going to be able to -- if I can get it.

4 But once you get some familiarity given
5 sort of silos, you can send your message out, your
6 flyers. I know myself the Chamber, a number of
7 different non-profits will get the word out through
8 their respective database. And as we build this race
9 car to more forward in it quicker, we can start
10 getting confidentiality releases earlier on in the
11 process so that we can provide that data to local
12 officials like yourself to make this kind of process
13 a lot more streamlined.

14 CHAIRMAN ULRICH: Well, I think that if
15 one thing came out of this hearing -- and I know a
16 lot of things came out of it -- but it's probably the
17 same recurring theme is that we're not doing enough
18 to help veterans in the City and the State of New
19 York. And it really is a sin, it's a travesty
20 because there are so many veterans who have lived
21 here, were born here, integrated here, and what have
22 you, that built this city.

23 That raised their families in this city
24 that have enriched this cities with their lives and
25 their work experience and everything that they've had

1
2 to offer. And have helped make this city the best
3 city in the world. And the fact that we don't have
4 policies and laws and incentives to help those people
5 who helped us, really is a shame. So, it's an
6 important resolution.

7 I'm urging my colleagues to sign on as
8 co-sponsors because again it's a non-partisan piece
9 of legislation, a very good one I think. And I'd
10 love you to look at it. I know we've been joined by
11 my friend and my colleague, Council Member Fernando
12 Cabrera of the Bronx. Does he have anything he wants
13 to say before we close the hour?

14 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: I want to
15 commend the Chair for introducing this resolution,
16 and that you and me are pleased to this resolution.

17 CHAIRMAN ULRICH: All right, and I think
18 that that's enough for today. So this committee
19 meeting will be adjourned. Thank you.

20 [gavel]

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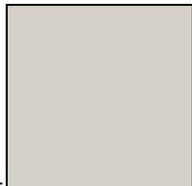
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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date April 23, 2014