

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS

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May 23, 2014
Start: 1:16 p.m.
Recess: 2:47 p.m.

HELD AT: Council Chambers
250 Broadway - Hearing Room, 14th
Fl

B E F O R E:
ERIC ULRICH
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Melissa Mark-Viverito
Jumaane D. Williams

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

Yehenio Caverio

Luis Quiros
Historian and Professor at Fordham
University

Ruben Estrada

Thomas Lopez
65th Infantry Regiment

Juan Varela
The Borinqueneers Congressional Gold Medal
Alliance

Vincent McGowan
President
The United War Veterans Council

Ryan Lutz
NYC Small Business Development Center

Marvin Holland

Luis Otero

Kevin Harrington
Vice President
Transport Workers Union

Giovanni Taveras
New York State Veteran Chamber of Commerce

Andy Moreno
Transit Workers Union

1 COMMITTEE ON VETERANS

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2 [Gavel].

3 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Good afternoon. I'm
4 Council Member Eric Ulrich, Chair of the City
5 Council's Committee on Veterans. Today the committee
6 will be discussing and considering three Resolutions
7 on varying topics but equally all of which are
8 equally important to veterans and their families
9 throughout the five boroughs. Before we continue,
10 I'd like to acknowledge the Council Members who have
11 joined us, both on the committee and those who are
12 guests of the committee. We have Council Member Alan
13 Maisel of Brooklyn, we have Jumaane Williams of
14 Brooklyn, a sponsor of one of the resolutions and he
15 will be speaking in a short while. Council Member
16 Paul Vallone of Queens, myself, the Speaker of the
17 City Council, Melissa Mark-Viverito. We're going to
18 hear from her in just a few minutes. To her right,
19 Council Member Fernando Cabrera of the Bronx and we
20 are also joined by Council Member Andy Cohen of the
21 Bronx and the Committee Counsel Kelly Taylor is here
22 as well.

23 So I'd like to turn the mike over to the
24 Speaker of the Council and then we'll proceed with
25 the hearing.

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2 SPEAKER MARK-VIVERITO: Thank you so much
3 Chair Ulrich for your advocacy on issues regarding
4 Veterans and obviously the support for these Resos
5 that we'll be listening to and hearing today. So
6 good afternoon, [Speaking Spanish]. I want to thank
7 this Intro's co-sponsor, Council Woman Marie del
8 Carmen Arroyo and also all the committee staff for
9 their help. I most especially want to thank the
10 veterans who are here today. Men like Erhenio Cavato
11 [sp?] of the 65th Infantry. We know your sacrifice
12 and we understand it. We know that many of your
13 brothers did not make it beyond battle fields. We
14 know that you earned and deserve a long overdue
15 national stage and spotlight. This is why as Speaker
16 of the City Council I urge the Council's Committee on
17 Veterans to Pass Resolution 103. I introduced this
18 resolution as a way for the council to show its
19 strong support for a Congressional Gold Medal for the
20 65th Infantry Regiment of Puerto Rico.

21 We were very happy to learn last night as
22 we were preparing and we've been anxiously wanting to
23 have this hearing and the Resolution adopted. That
24 last night, the Senate passed this measure which now
25 awaits President Obama's signature. The soldiers of

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2 the 65th are known as the Borinqueneers. Most who
3 served in this regimen were from the island. But
4 many state-side Puerto Ricans, including Dr. Frank
5 Bonilla who is a founder of the communities Center
6 for Puerto Rican Studies were members of the 65th.
7 The 65th most distinguished itself during the Korean
8 War, to the point that it earned the high praise of
9 General Douglas MacArthur. The Borinqueneers endured
10 brutal conditions and harsh terrain during an era
11 where war still involved and to hand combat. And
12 unfortunately, like other soldiers and units of
13 color, the 65th was subjected to negative
14 stereotypes, a double-standard, heavier penalties
15 than their white counterparts and under decoration.
16 Despite this the Borinqueneers served with great
17 bravery and remained true to the 65ths model of honor
18 and fidelity. And I must point out that they did so
19 at a time when Puerto Rico was being treated and
20 continues to be treated very undemocratically.

21 So many of our beloved veterans are not
22 alive to see the eve of this historic Congressional
23 Gold Medal. We remember them this and every Memorial
24 Day. Those who remain with us should and must know
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2 that their city, their islands and the nation they
3 served recognize them before the world.

4 So I also wanted to..., you know, this year
5 the Puerto Rican Day Parade is also honoring the
6 Borinqueneers and I do want to pay special
7 recognition to Congresswoman Nydia Velazquez whose
8 been extremely, extremely firm on this issue to the
9 point, that as I said, the Senate did vote and we're
10 waiting the President's signature. From a daughter
11 whose father and whose grandfather did serve in the
12 Army and in the Navy, you know, I really thank all
13 the veterans for their sacrifice and I'm very excited
14 that we will be passing this reso. So with that I
15 encourage my colleagues to join me in supporting this
16 resolution and encourage New Yorkers to salute The
17 Borinqueneers who are being honored in this year's
18 National Puerto Rican Day Parade on June 8th.

19 Thank you Chair Ulrich.

20 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you Madam
21 Speaker and I want to thank you for your continued
22 support of this committee and the important work that
23 we are doing on behalf of veterans. The Speaker has
24 been a staunch supporter of many of the Resolutions
25 and the Bills that have been introduced by me and my

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2 colleagues and we're looking forward to passing this
3 Resolution as well as the other two which we'll be
4 discussing today.

5 The Committee will hear Resolution 103,
6 introduced by the Speaker urging President Obama to
7 sign HR-1726 and S-1174. Legislation to award the
8 Congressional Gold Medal to the 65th Infantry
9 Regiment, known as the Borinqueneers. How was that?
10 Okay very good.

11 The 65th Infantry Regiment, Puerto Rico's
12 only active duty regiment, played a prominent role in
13 World War I, World War II and the Korean War. The
14 65th Infantry Regiment performed many remarkable
15 military accomplishments and this legislation
16 acknowledges their sacrifice and invaluable
17 contributions defending our freedom. The committee
18 will also hear Resolution #79 introduced by my
19 colleague, Council Member Jumaane Williams, which
20 calls for the creation of a tickertape parade for
21 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. Personally, I can
22 think of no better way to honor the post 911 veterans
23 and returning service members with a welcome home
24 celebration down the canyon of heroes and I applaud
25 Council Member Williams and the Minority Leader

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2 Council Member Vinny Ignizio who introduced a similar
3 Resolution in support of the tickertape parade.

4 New York City hosted a Welcome Home
5 Parade for veterans after World War I, after the
6 first Gulf War and I know that the council will work
7 very closely with Mayor de Blasio, his administration
8 and our federal elected officials to see this parade
9 to fruition. Lastly, the committee will explore a
10 resolution I introduced last month, Resolution 200.
11 Which calls upon the New York State Legislature to
12 pass and the Governor to sign Senate Bill 4714 and
13 Assembly accompanying Bill 6974. Legislation that
14 would allow public employees who rendered peace time
15 military service to purchase and apply credit towards
16 New York Retirement Systems. Currently New York
17 State Law only allows certain honorably discharged
18 veterans working in the public sector the opportunity
19 to purchase, essentially buy-back and apply up to
20 three years of their military service credit towards
21 their retirement. However, the law as it stands,
22 excludes and does not allow all peace time veterans
23 and even some who served during designated periods of
24 conflict. This legislation would rightfully extend
25 eligibility to all honorably discharged veterans.

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COMMITTEE ON VETERANS

I want to acknowledge and thank again. The support of the Speaker of the Council, Melissa Mark-Viverito, Council Member Jumaane Williams, whose bill we are discussing today and all of the members of the committee for joining us.

And now we will hear from the first panel.

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Oh actually, first we have to hear from Jumaane Williams. How could I forget? Okay, the sponsor of Reso 79, Council Member Jumaane Williams.

COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Thank you Mr. Chair Ulrich and thank you Speaker for being here. And members of the Committee for holding the resolution on Resolution 79. I'd also like to thank Council Members Gentile and Vallone along with the Chair for co-sponsoring this resolution as well as the thanking Council Member Ignizio for a similar one and most importantly to the veterans who are in the audience.

With Memorial Day right around the corner, it is important that we hear this resolution today in honor of all our brave men and women who've

1 worn the uniform and sacrificed so much on behalf of
2 the city, state and our nation. The resolution calls
3 for the City of New York to public recognize veterans
4 of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars with tickertape
5 welcome parade to keep with the similar events
6 extended to veterans of the Vietnam, Gulf and Korean
7 wars. Tickertape parades in New York City were the
8 result of the evolution of years of public
9 celebration in the city and that the first such
10 parade occurred in 1886 when workers threw and
11 tickertape out of office windows to celebrate the
12 dedication of the Statute of Liberty. Tickertape
13 parades welcomed home veterans from both World War I
14 and World War II and later the Korean and Vietnam
15 wars. But only years after the conflicts ended.

17 Over 2.6 million service men and women
18 were deployed as part of the wars in Iraq and
19 Afghanistan. Approximately 6,793 have lost their
20 lives and 52,000 have been injured. Further many
21 veterans return home to a depressed economy struggle
22 to find employment, decent housing and supportive
23 services needed. I want to be clear. This is not
24 about, for me, support of any particular war. It is
25 about men and women who were asked to risk their

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lives from what they believed were for the best interest of this country, this city, this nation and were made promises and if we hear what's happening in Washington with the VA and we know veterans who are not getting the things that they were promised and not getting the honor that they so deserved. And if we can have sports teams walking down the canyon of heroes. We most should have our veterans walking down the canyon of heroes who risked their lives and risk more than that, I believe. Their entire being, their person, their families, the mental stability, that's the least, the minimum that we should be able to do.

Let's honor those who have sacrificed for us all, by supporting a tickertape parade in their honor. Thank you Mr. Chair and I'd like to ask to add my name to Resolution 103 and 200.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you Council Member Williams. And I know that before we call up the first panel, Council Member Fernando Cabrera also asked to speak in support of the Speaker's Reso.

[Background talk]

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: After, alright, good, even better. So let's call up the first panel.

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COMMITTEE ON VETERANS

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Yehenio Caveró (phonetic), from the 65th Infantry Regiment Veteran...

[Background talk]

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Juan Varela, the Borinqueneers Congressional Gold Medal Alliance, if he is here. Professor Luis Quiros, a Borinqueneer, is here?

[Background talk]

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Please. And Colonel Roberto...

[Background talk]

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Present. Okay.

[Background talk]

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: He's a U.S. Army Historian.

[SPEAKING SPANISH]

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay. Mr. Estrada right.

[Background talk]

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay. Yes, alright. We'll start with Mr. Caveró. Please press the button on the microphone. Draw it closer to you and speak when you're ready.

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COMMITTEE ON VETERANS

MR. CAVERO: Ladies and gentlemen of the New York City Council and Committee on Veterans, thank you for the invitation to appear here today. To testify on behalf of Resolution #103 urging the President of the United States and Congress to award the Congressional Gold Medal to the 65th Infantry Regiment known as The Borinqueneers. I have copies of my testimony for all of you. I am not going to read all of that. I am going to read the bottom lines.

In the United States Army we have a very simple formula about presentations. Tell them what you're going to tell them, tell them, then tell them what you told them. So this is what I'm going to tell you. My bottom line, up front. United States Army's 65th Infantry Regiment is more than worthy of being awarded the Congressional Gold Medal for its service and sacrifice to this country for three reasons. First, the 65th Infantry Regiment fought brilliantly in Korea despite problems, later in the war. The Regiment arrived in September 1950 in Korea, the largest and best trained United States regular army, infantry regiment in Korea at the time. The only regiments that approximated the strength of

1 the regiment or the training, were the Marines. And
2 by the way, the reason the regiment arrives in Korea,
3 the best trained regiment. It is the only regiment
4 in the United States Army in 1950 that participated
5 in three major exercises in the last three years
6 before the war. The 1948 Atlantic Fleet Exercises,
7 by the way, with United States Marines. The 1949
8 Atlantic Fleet Exercises with United States Marines
9 and the 1950 Puerto Rican Maneuvers Portrex. The
10 largest post-war exercises since World War II. The
11 regiment was asked during these exercises to defend
12 the Island of Vieques against the 3rd Infantry
13 Division and the 82nd Airborne Division, my old
14 division. The regiment was supposed to be run over
15 the first day of the exercises. It stopped the 3rd
16 Infantry Division landings on the first day and it
17 wiped out the 82nd Infantry Battalion that jumped in
18 on the second day. The regiment held the island to
19 the last day of the exercises when, instead of
20 surrendering, it counterattacked with everything it
21 had left and made it all the way back to the beaches.
22 And it was this brilliant performance that brought
23 the regiment to the attention of the army. You see,
24 up to this point, Puerto Ricans had registered in
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1 large numbers. Hispanics had registered in large
2 numbers to serve in World War I and World War II but
3 they were not called up. And why? This was a
4 nation, at the time, and an army that put little
5 faith in people of color. So when Puerto Ricans did
6 serve in World War I and World War II they were given
7 the assignments of guarding installations, guarding
8 lines of communications. Now Portrex happens, the
9 army is very short of personnel, it is sending
10 infantry regiments to Korea that are short..., so a
11 regiment is about 4,000 people..., that are short as
12 many as 1,000 to 2,000 people each. It attempts to
13 stop the North Koreans after the invasion in June of
14 1950, by putting an American Infantry Regiment in
15 front of them that was under-strengthened, poorly
16 trained and did not have the proper weapons. And
17 they were wiped out. So now the regiment arrives in
18 Korea and it is a welcome addition. 4,000 Puerto
19 Rican soldiers, most of them veterans from WWII and
20 to their surprise the army finds out that there's
21 another 3,000 trained Puerto Rican soldiers already
22 in the replacement pipeline for the regiment and they
23 can't believe it. The strength of the Puerto Ricans
24 in the U.S. Military was so high that in the first
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2 year of the war, the army considers forming an all
3 Puerto Rican division of the 265th Infantry Regiment
4 of the Korean Puerto Rican National Guard, the 266 of
5 the Puerto Rican National Guard and the 65th Infantry
6 with all the support and supply units being from
7 Puerto Rico. But there's such a shortage of manpower
8 that they turned this down. So now, the regiment
9 gets to Korea and in the first year of the war,
10 serves with..., right away is attached to the 2nd
11 Infantry Division that needs them badly and then is
12 attached to the 25th that needs them badly and
13 finally the 3rd Infantry Division arrives and it's
14 attached to that division for the duration.

15 The men in the regiment fight brilliantly
16 and are recognized not only Douglas MacArthur.
17 They're recognized by all of the generals as strong
18 performers. They had good commanders, but most of
19 all they had Puerto Rican soldiers that spoke English
20 and Spanish that had a great deal of experience and
21 that were veterans. And this is a unique regiment.
22 It was a segregated regiment. Okay. By law. Puerto
23 Rican soldiers coming from the island could only
24 serve in this regiment. By law, Puerto Rican
25 sergeants could only serve in this regiment. And so

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2 these soldiers and sergeants, they'd grown up
3 together, they knew each other, they were neighbors,
4 they were family. And so they fought like this band
5 of brothers, tremendously well.

6 You have the history in front of you.
7 You see that the regiment conducts one of the last
8 bayonet charges at battalion level to take a hill
9 from the North Koreans. The history will show you
10 that when the 8th Army evacuated North Korea, a
11 battalion of the 65th Infantry was one of the last to
12 leave the beach. It held the beach against an entire
13 Chinese Army and later in May of 1951 when the
14 Chinese counterattack and our over running American
15 units, the regiment fights again brilliantly.
16 Inflicting huge losses, and I have been in the all of
17 the official records, to include the intelligence
18 records, reading what the Chinese were saying, and
19 they avoided the 65th Infantry. Because their losses
20 were too high, so they shatter a Belgium battalion on
21 the left and another battalion and another battalion
22 on the right and the regiment is fighting the entire
23 time, but survives this massive onslaught in the
24 spring of 1951. So this regiment, ladies and
25 gentlemen, fought brilliantly. I tell you this as

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2 you as a United States Historian who worked at the
3 Army Center for Military History for three years who
4 was brought aboard there because of my qualifications
5 to write, first a special study, and then the history
6 of this regiment. And I tell you this as a United
7 States Army Officer, a combat arms officers, an armor
8 officer, a paratrooper, a United States Army
9 Strategist and Historian. I also tell you this as a
10 son of an American Soldier, Jesus Maria Hermosa
11 (phonetic) who fought with the 65th in Korea. And I
12 tell you this as the father of three American
13 soldiers. My sons and I have been at war for the
14 last eleven years. So I am a historian, I am a
15 soldier, I was asked to write this history and I did.

16 The second point I want to let you know,
17 is that Puerto Ricans from the island served at more
18 than twice the rate per capita of continental
19 Americans in the United States Army in Korea and
20 suffered twice the casualties. This statistic comes
21 from the general archives of Puerto Rico. From the
22 file of the Governor of Puerto Rico, Louis Marin.
23 Okay, he had a special study done on this. This
24 despite the fact that the men of the regiment were
25 subject to tremendous discrimination from the

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continental officers and soldiers from their owner commanders. Okay, so they suffered twice the casualties. That casualty rate has never really been recognized and I really don't want to go through statistics with you, but the statistics, I have a second page in there which shows you all the statistics. And finally...

[Interpose]

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Which page is that?

MR. CAVERO: It would be..., give me one minute here..., It's after the synopsis towards the end, so it's going to be page 22. So right here you see that the total body casualties from what we call continental Americans, white Americans, was 0.9% of the U.S. population in Korea. For Puerto Ricans, it was 0.14% or almost twice the same rate. And all the statistics are there in terms of number of deaths, wounded and casualties.

The final point..., and so, what do I call this, you know, I call this disproportionate sacrifice. While should the regiment be recognized? First of all because it fought brilliantly, but second, because disproportionate sacrifice. Third, because it's service and sacrifices were not

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2 adequately recognized. Despite the fact that the
3 65th Infantry arrived in Korea before either the 7th
4 or 15th Infantry Regiments of the same division, the
5 3rd Infantry Division. With which it served the 65th
6 Infantry Regiment and its soldiers, to this day,
7 remain grossly under-represented in terms of awards.
8 In terms of Medals of Honor, Distinguished Service
9 Crosses, Silver Stars and Bronze Stars. In fact, the
10 President of the United States awarded the First
11 Congressional Medal of Honor to a Korean War Veteran
12 of the 65th Regiment only in March of this year. It
13 is time to recognize the valor of the men of the 65th
14 Infantry who fought not one, but two enemies.
15 Simultaneously for four brutal years in Korea. The
16 North Korean and Chinese Armies and discrimination.
17 It's time to correct the record with regard to the
18 United States Army Puerto Rican Regiment. Our WWII
19 and Korean War veterans are dying at the rate of
20 1,500 a day. I thank god every day that my father, a
21 veteran of the regiment in Korea, and the United
22 States Army, is still with us. But I wonder, how
23 many more years will that be so. We no longer have
24 the luxury of endless debates. We must act and
25 insure that justice is done, that service and

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sacrifice are recognized. That these men, from America's forgotten war, know that as long as there's a United States of America, they will be honored and remembered. It is time to award The Borinqueneers, of the 65th Infantry Regiment, the Congressional Gold Medal for their many, many years of service and sacrifice to this country. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you for your testimony.

[Background talk]

[SPEAKING SPANISH]

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: This morning I received a call from a friend just to give me the news that Congress had passed a bill giving the Congressional Gold Medal to the unit of the 65th Infantry Regiment. It was something overwhelming that I didn't expect. I thought that maybe by the end of the year we would be able to get it. So, I'm very proud. I thank everybody involved in it. I thank Congress and I heard that President Obama will sign the Bill making it law. Thank you.

[Background talk]

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COMMITTEE ON VETERANS

SPEAKER MARK-VIVERITO: Yes the senate passed it, yes. I mentioned it in my remarks. So thank you for your service.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: On behalf of my colleagues, and all the people at the City Council, I want to thank you for your service to our country and your service does not go unrecognized or unrewarded. And that day is coming and it is coming soon. With the President's signature. We're looking forward to that.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: I'm just one of the 61,000 Puerto Ricans that went to Korea. So, it's an honor. On their behalf I, I'm choking, I'm the spokesman for them, for those who never came back, which over 700 died there. So I still remember them. Every one of the guys that I had on my side and we fought the Chinese and the North Korean. They spilled their blood. I was lucky. I came back in one piece. But many of them, many died, many lost arms and legs, so I still remember those guy and for them I believe that it's an honor to all of them. Not so much me, so thank you again.

SPEAKER MARK-VIVERITO: Thank you very much for, again, your service and for testifying and

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I can imagine how emotional it was when you heard that the Senate passed this and hopefully we'll get the signature shortly of the President. But, thank you. I don't know whose next.

[SPEAKING SPANISH]

[Background talk]

SPEAKER MARK-VIVERITO: Put the mike on please and state your name for the record.

PROFESSOR QUIROS: Thank you. Luis Quiros. I am activist, social worker, professor at Fordham University, and author, etc. Lifelong Puerto Rican, fighting for our community. Can I continue now?

There was a pre-requisite. Why do we consistently need to defend ourselves as Puerto Ricans? It's about respect. Through respect and pride though viewed as the others, the only box that I can fill in the United States when I was born. I am 68 ½ years old, the only box available to me was others.

In the middle of the 19th Century, Puerto Ricans began requiring an identity beyond that of colonial subjects or Spain. The incidents depicted slave insurgence, a colic epidemic, and hurricanes

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2 and are based on a history that is largely
3 unfamiliar. I wanted to write a book with lots of
4 characters and I wanted to explore what it meant and
5 what it means to be a Puerto Rican and us viewed as
6 others in these United States.

7 A not too distant event illustrates one
8 of millions of which I will refer to demonstrated the
9 absence of our due to heroic men and women, women
10 spelled with a y, who served in these United States.
11 One person or group is awarded by merely being alive
12 while we Puerto Ricans are not. As it becomes clear,
13 the concept of the other is one of the central issues
14 of the debate and needs further analysis. For some
15 activists and theorists to care for others is the
16 human and Christian task per se as for Puerto Ricans.
17 Post-colonial critiques on the other, I believe
18 should be mandated instead of ignored. Why? Because
19 it took me too long, and I was too late to grasp my
20 Puerto Rican grandfather's words [SPEAKING SPANISH].
21 I was unaware I was black until I arrived in this
22 country. Being bullied on a daily basis became
23 normal, just for being brown and Puerto Rican.
24 Proudly and somewhat sorry that I can state that too
25 few people even know that Puerto Rico was the first

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2 to embrace and address the economic justice by
3 incorporating the Universal Declaration of Human
4 Rights in their constitution in 1952. Tracing the
5 Montana Constitutions Provisions on Human Dignity to
6 its origins to the Declaration of Human Rights is
7 noted. "The 1972 Amendment to Montana's Constitution
8 which included the term Human Dignity was drawn from
9 Puerto Rico's Constitution. During the drafting of
10 Puerto Rico's Constitution, the United Nation played
11 a key role, both in inspiring provisions based on
12 human rights and a vehicle for attempt at resolution
13 for the commonwealth's relationship to the United
14 States.

15 My mother undoubtedly was teaching me
16 resistance and in particular the new post-colonial
17 resistance model in order to lean towards a true
18 democratic model. She, most importantly, she kept me
19 Puerto Rican. My grandfather. My mother's father,
20 fought in WWI because the United States needed
21 soldiers. So Puerto Ricans became citizens though we
22 could not vote for the President of the United States
23 unless we lived state side. There has never been a
24 war the United States was involved with that a
25 brother or prima de mano was not fighting. My

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2 younger brother died of Agent Orange while serving
3 two tours in Vietnam. My niece and nephews had to
4 fight to receive \$10,000 from Union Carbide because
5 they are the manufacturer of Agent Orange.

6 Identity politics took its modern form
7 during the second half of the last century. It
8 emerged as an emancipatory mode, a political action
9 in thinking, based on the shared experience of
10 injustice by particular groups, notably blacks,
11 women, gays, Latinos and American Indians. It is a
12 movement born in a double negation. The rejection of
13 rejection through the proud self-conscious unit of
14 those who have been defined as belonging to the
15 excluded group. It is precisely this focus on a
16 particular group and the significance of indifference
17 from a dominant other that serves many on the left
18 and on the right and in the center.

19 68 years of age, and 46 years after the
20 violence that defined 1968 and two graduate degrees
21 were not enough for me to have learned to defend
22 myself the effects of power language and to make
23 better choices. Race and class were so deeply rooted
24 to this..., of this nation that a different focus was
25 necessary in order to distinguish between forms of

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2 racism that are intentional and conscious and yet
3 justified.

4 That is why I'm here to speak to you
5 today. To talk to you about the power engraved in
6 the absence of policy that deny us the recognition
7 that is earned and what it is and feels like to be
8 the other. As people of color are experiences are
9 many. Some of us are native to these lands now
10 called United States. Some of us are residents here
11 due to our ancestors kidnapping and enslavement or
12 because our family left our home countries to escape
13 violent economic policies enacted by the United
14 States and other nations. We have not all
15 experienced the same levels of abuse, poverty or
16 imprisonment, however, we are all survivors of
17 colonization, a system that continues under global
18 capitals and more foreign occupation and abuses at
19 home, such as racial profiling, the prison system and
20 severe budget cuts. On January 8, 2008, while
21 driving, I heard an apology over the radio from the
22 State of New Jersey for the wrongdoings inflicted by
23 slavery and its aftereffects on the United States.
24 This was the first Northern State to apologize nearly
25 160 years after it abolished slavery. On January

1
2 9th, there was news of a disability payment
3 approximately \$100,000 to a WWII veteran who had been
4 traumatized by the war. As a Fordham University
5 professor, I used both items to open a class
6 discussion, was there a way to connect them? One
7 ship he served on the USS Savannah was attacked
8 September 11, 1943, and 200 men were killed.
9 McDonald the name of the sailor trembled visibly as
10 he recalled trying to help badly injured shipmates
11 and waiting in life boats for help to come. I was
12 scared to death, he said. Planes were flying
13 overhead like thunder and lightning. He has suffered
14 since, post-traumatic stress disorder. The VA
15 officially diagnosed with non-service related
16 schizophrenia and they awarded him \$100,000. In San
17 Juan [SPEAKING SPANISH] the song was written in 1942
18 for Estrada's brother who had been deployed to Panama
19 during WWII. To me that song is my national anthem.
20 My mother was aware before the creation of Puerto
21 Rico the Commonwealth 1950-1952, has this nation's
22 focus on the accumulation of wealth created a country
23 that demanded patriotism, exalted capitalism, but too
24 often could not accommodate morality. She believed
25 in God more than the United States Government and in

1
2 spite of the negativity towards Latinos my parents
3 quickly learned to navigate New York, contrary to the
4 trend. Contrary to the trend, it was my parent's
5 decision to live among the community that looked and
6 spoke like them. As children and young adults we
7 were never told to dance around a raindrop to avoid
8 discrimination. If we did not succeed it was our
9 fault. Whether this was a form of denial or a
10 strategy, we were not allowed to feel victimized.
11 Ironically, my desire to be different from Latino
12 stereotypes, translated to viewing support of white
13 television family programming at the expense as well
14 as all other communities of color. In 1951, Brown v.
15 the Board of Ed., my parents pulled me out of first
16 grade in public school because I arrived late and I
17 would be asked to leave the building. Unable to
18 catch up to my parents' departing car, I would walk
19 around Harlem for a day. In parochial schools I
20 learned that God loved me. I had a lot to be
21 thankful for and I shouldn't expect more. White kids
22 were privy to the expectation that they would make
23 great doctors or lawyers someday. A passion for
24 preserving our culture was constant in our home.
25 Romantic Puerto Rican music, Dominican, Cuban music

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played continuously on our record player. No doubt the most loving moments I experienced were those sitting next to her, my mother. Excuse me.

[Pause]

PROFESSOR QUIROS: She collected 78 rpm records, played the piano, never smoked or consumed alcohol and worked tirelessly to disguise the reality of our stress filled, social and economic condition. Our survival and earned recognition critical for our children, rests on our passing down our Puerto Ricanism to our children. If one of us is not free, none of us are. Like my mother did for me, this nation must recognize us so that our children can be kept Puerto Ricans. Instead of being placed in special education classes and prison disproportionately to other communities. You see it is not just a medal of honor we fight for, we must fight for the democracy this nation was supposed to adopt. This country must be better than the good idea. It's only up to us, what you do not do falls at the burden on all our children. Your child's smile is depending on what the rest of you do or do not do. We want the Medal of Honor but we want it 24/7 in everything that Puerto Ricans do. Thank you.

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2 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you for your
3 testimony. We're going to here from Mr. Estrada and
4 then we are going to hear from Tommy Lopez, another
5 Korean War vet who served in the 65th Infantry
6 Regiment. Mr. Estrada, will you take the mike a
7 little closer to you and just state your name for the
8 record as you begin your testimony.

9 RUBEN ESTRADA: Thank you. My name is
10 Rubin Estrada and I am Deputy Director of the 65th
11 Infantry on the Task Force, and also co-chairman of
12 the 65th Infantry National Commemorative Stamp
13 Committee. May I begin by..., my testimony submitted
14 with regard to Resolution 79. Mr. Chairwoman,
15 correct? Mr. Chairman of the Committee, is he, who
16 is the chairman of the committee here?

17 [Background talk]

18 RUBEN ESTRADA: Mr. Ulrich. How are you?

19 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I'm the chairman and
20 she's the Speaker of our Council.

21 RUBEN ESTRADA: Melissa, my
22 congratulations for being honored the Grand Marshall
23 of the parade, I think it is, I was told and also we
24 come from similar circumstances. I am born and
25 raised in the barrio and I'm 60 years old and my

1
2 brothers and sisters were all trailblazers when it
3 was not West Side Story, it was East Side Story.
4 Notwithstanding, and let me begin by please accepting
5 this written testimony presented by my proxy, which
6 is myself.

7 On behalf of the veterans of the 65th
8 Infantry and on the task force we thank you for the
9 invitation to participate in this hearing. In regard
10 to number 79, Resolution 79, we concur and support
11 the principles and creation and presentation of a
12 tickertape parade to honor the veterans for the Iraq
13 and Afghani wars. We also will be glad to offer our
14 assistance in planning and protocols for such an
15 event if called upon to do so. Resolution 103, a
16 resolution which obviously has passed in both houses.
17 I will be present in Washington and sitting..., and
18 will be at the desk of the President for signature
19 which I think it will happen. It's awarded the
20 Congressional Medal of Honor, the 65th Infantry
21 Regiment, known to us as The Borinqueneers. The 65th
22 Honor Task Force has been in support of the award,
23 Congressional Gold Medal since 2002. We have
24 collaborated and assisted in early drafts of bills
25 with the Office of Congress and Pedro Pierluisi. In

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2 regards to the proposed drafts presented here, let us
3 first commend the staff who were diligent in their
4 presentation. Please convey our compliments. Upon
5 close inspection we would suggest five modifications
6 on the resolution. Which would be to change the word
7 urging, to recommending to Congress. Also when we
8 talk about the Master Sergeant Negron. Who we had
9 the pleasure of having a enbodio [sic] recently. His
10 daughter, with the medal. We hosted her at the
11 Towers Community Museum, which is the Hall of Fame of
12 stickball. Charlie Diaz's operation. When we talk
13 about we'll received it, he already received it he
14 was decorated posthumously. Okay, so that change of
15 language there. Remove the paragraph, whereas other
16 military units. Remove the word segregation.
17 Replace the word imperative that Congress, to
18 responsibility of. The Congressional Medal of Honor
19 is the highest decoration that Congress can bestow on
20 any military organization, individual civilian for a
21 unique distinction based on their merit alone. And I
22 say that very special because, we're not begging for
23 an award, we're not soliciting for an award, we honor
24 our soldiers by we should get this award. The unique
25 distinction of the 65th Infantry Regiment beyond any

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2 other past awardee, is they conducted what became
3 their last battalion size bayonet charge which was
4 referenced by the historian, in American history.
5 They share this roll distinction with only the 3rd
6 U.S. Infantry, the Old Guard escort to the President.
7 Which recently when we were in Washington and we took
8 the 65th Infantry members to Washington during the
9 time there was the close down or the lockdown of the
10 U.S. government. We got saluted by the 3rd Infantry
11 Regiment for The Borinqueneers. Against all rules of
12 the President or the Congress closing down the
13 memorials. Notwithstanding, additionally the
14 Congressional Gold Medal is not a contest to be
15 compared with past awardees as each organization was
16 confronted by their own unique sets of challenges and
17 manners in which they overcame. It is attributed to
18 each of them alone. Additionally, the soldiers of
19 the 65th Infantry Regiment of Puerto Rico that
20 engaged in the battles sited were not college
21 educated fighters, pilots, nor were they specially
22 trained elite, intelligence code takers or talkers,
23 more first generation descendants of a country that
24 war was with the U.S. Nor were they super soldiers
25 equipped with stuff like the Seal Team 6. They were

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2 only an average age of 19 years old. Rifleman,
3 infantry men, mud grunts as the infantry are
4 affectionately called by their peers who faced
5 astounding merits with valor, fueled by pure guts,
6 armed with bayonets and fought their enemy hand to
7 hand. They just took it. Their deeds have elevated
8 them into a category of their own. They earned the
9 recommendation of the Congressional Medal of Honor
10 based on unique merit alone. There are none with
11 whom they can be compared today, except maybe the
12 Spartan 300 led by King Leonidis at the Battle of
13 Thermopylae. Is that correct? It's interested that
14 Tony put this in here. The Congressional Gold Medal
15 process is a dedicated stage at this moment. Last
16 Monday the Bill was introduced to the House and I
17 won't talk about this simply because it's already
18 done, the Senate and the House has passed that. Some
19 like to sell the unique regiment being segregated and
20 reasons to award them the Congressional Medal of
21 Honor. We contend the debate forum is a scholastic
22 one, but conducted as the university with a panel of
23 experts and veterans. Our opposition is based on
24 history and soldiers' code of honor. We humbly
25 request to be respected.

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2 Fact one, when President Truman signed
3 the Desegregation Bill law back in 1948, segregation
4 in the military was a federal crime in 1950. Fact
5 two, the 65th Infantry Regiment was native to Puerto
6 Rico. By native they would be predominantly
7 comprised of soldiers native to their state of
8 origin. As much as the unit was from Texas would be
9 primarily Texans. If the unit came from Harlem, it
10 would be African Americans and so on. Fact three,
11 the killed in action roster for the 65th Infantry
12 lists the names and places of birth of Borinqueneers
13 who were not native to Puerto Rico, but none the less
14 full blooded brothers of the regiment. To deny them
15 their place in honor alongside their gallant fallen
16 will never be tolerated by the veterans ever.

17 Mr. Chairman and committee members let no
18 one make the mistake that we are begging for medals,
19 that we are begging for recognition that we are
20 begging for validation. Valor is not measured by
21 mediocrity. Courage is not validated by
22 proclamations or resolutions. These are things of
23 spirit, in the spirit and honor means to be what it
24 is. Right even if never receive credit for it nor
25 will be rewarded because of it. The prudent guidance

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we can offer this committee when deliberating how best to represent respect and honor the soldiers of the 65th Infantry Regiment, is to convey their spirit of defiance in the face of enemies they fought in battle. The discrimination they fought in society and the worse enemy of all, the curse of the self-pity, they ever reject. Simply respect us and reserve pity for those enemies we are called upon to combat in defense of our countrymen. My team are open to your questions and comments.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you for your testimony, we have, as I mentioned earlier, Tommy Lopez, a Korean war veteran and a member of the 65th Infantry Regiment and a part of the task force. We'd like him to come up and deliver his testimony. I know he's been waiting patiently and we are so grateful that he's here to offer his testimony in support of the bill. And we are also joined by Juan Varela from the Congressional Gold Medal Alliance. If he can take a seat, and the members who have previously spoken, if they can step off the dais, just to make some room for Mr. Varela and Mr. Lopez.

[Pause]

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CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Mr. Lopez, could you put the microphone on or someone assist him and state your name and make your remarks. Thank you sir.

THOMAS LOPEZ: Hi my name is Thomas Lopez. I'm part of the 65th Infantry Regiment. I'm very proud to be part of it. Thank you Ms. Viverito and your council people here, because this is about time that we want to receive this achievement. Which is I think has been a long time, to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor. [SPEAKING SPANISH] That means I'm a hillbilly. I come from the country and I came here to the United States when I was a young fellow and when I was drafted, and I went to Korea I was surprised I had people talking in Spanish in those mountains. I say I asked the sergeant, what is there here. I thought I was in Manhattan or the Bronx. He said kid, this is the 65th Infantry, you don't have any idea how proud I felt because I didn't know I was going to be part of the 65th because I was drafted here. And God bless all our colleagues, God bless the people, God bless the Congress and the President of the United States and I hope I can still be part of serving our country like I'm doing, as a

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volunteer for 34 years in the Bronx VA Hospital serving our fellow veterans and the community.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: [SPEAKING SPANISH]

THOMAS LOPEZ: It's my pleasure.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: I think we have one more. Mr. Varela I think you wanted to say a few words. If you want to speak.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Just pull the mike closer to you and...

[Background talk]

JUAN VARELA: Good afternoon, first of all. Thanks for having us. I'm the Southern New York and Regional Director for The Borinqueneers Congressional Gold Medal Alliance and as previously stated the House passed a bill last week. The sponsor of that bill was Congressman Pierluisi. The Senate voted on this yesterday, went forward and there was a tremendous team effort that went behind this. I find it extremely bizarre that these folks are speaking on behalf of this when they were opposed to it. We welcomed their support and their presence with all these uniforms and bells and whistles and all the time it took up here. But just for the record, these guys were obstacles, to get this thing

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done and it is getting done and is going to signature for the President and I'm a little bit disappointed that we have this occur as it has. But we'd like to thank you guys. If it has not been signed by the President as yet, a Resolution asking that be done would be wonderful, would be appreciated asking the Senate and the Congress to do the same would not be necessary at this point. And I don't really take up more time because it's actually been done.

SPEAKER MARK-VIVERITO: Well I think that this is a position that we're taking in terms of support. It's something that we have been supportive of over the years and I think that any added voice that will express to the President the sense of urgency, I think is something that is helpful, I think, at this time. So, I appreciate that you have your point of view and your position, but this is something that, I think is going to be helpful and it's a point of position that the City Council is taking about supporting our veterans and supporting the recognition that they deserve. It's also a way of us stating a point of view. So that's why we've taken this and it was actually on the calendar for a while before we found out last night, which was great

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news to hear. That the Senate had also voted on it and passed it. So I think that based on the fact that this was already something that we had calendared and we had moved forward on, we want to at least take it to its completion as a way of expressing our point of view.

JUAN VARELA: Absolutely. I'm very sorry. I wasn't..., I didn't make myself clear. I was not being dismissive of your effort. That was not the purpose. Of course this body sending the resolution forward is very significant, absolutely. My point was against the others that just spoke on behalf of it, that's all it was.

SPEAKER MARK-VIVERITO: Okay.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: So I just want to embellish just a little bit on some of what the Speaker said. We have made it the prerogative of this committee. Even on issues and matters which we don't have jurisdiction or control over, such as bills that are in the State Legislature or pending in Congress to take a public stance on those measures, because they impact our constituents and so New York City is home to more than 200,000 veterans and they are effected by a host of federal, state and city

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2 issues. But more so state and federal. But on the
3 matters which we don't have control over, we want the
4 state and our colleagues in the federal government to
5 know that it is still important to the city and to
6 the veterans that live in the city to pass those
7 measures to pass those bills, because it will provide
8 a tremendous benefit or relief to those people which
9 we are also elected to represent. So that is the
10 purpose sometimes of this committee. The focus of
11 this committee is on Resolutions on Legislative
12 matters in Albany or in Washington but it doesn't
13 mean that it's any less important and I appreciate
14 your support of the bill and I know that you and I
15 and all the people in this room are very much looking
16 forward to the President signing this bill and it
17 just so happens that the U.S. Senate passed it last
18 night but it was, as the Speaker mentioned calendared
19 and we'll follow through on every commitment that we
20 make to shed light on these issues and let the city
21 know that we're doing our part to support the
22 veterans in New York City.

23 JUAN VARELA: I'd like to add one more
24 thing if I could. In New York City we have a
25 tremendous problem with homeless veterans. And if

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perhaps in your capacity to influence change regarding that. It is disgraceful. I have seen a lady, and I'm not trivializing a male sleeping under a bridge versus a female sleeping under a bridge. But it's a problem. And it is what it is and that is not an overstatement, but it is a serious problem with drug addiction, PTSD and homelessness on the part of veterans. They're all over the streets in the Bronx. You'll find them...

SPEAKER MARK-VIVERITO: Very true.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: On issues relating to housing, related to mental health, related to unemployment and all of the issues that the city does have control over, we are scheduling and have already had hearings, oversight hearings over those matters to see what we can do to help veterans. And I can tell you that this committee is extremely active and I have one of the..., I'm very lucky to have one of the few committees that I think all of colleagues agree with me on everything that we're producing. Because when it comes to helping the veterans on these things, on these issues, there really is no democrat or republican right way and a wrong way. And we've had a hearing already on job placement, with

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2 unemployment. We had a hearing, what was the...,
3 suicide prevention. We passed a Resolution calling
4 on Congress to pass the Senator Walsh's bill out of
5 Montana. That was just passed. The previous stated
6 suicide rate among veterans is much higher than a
7 regular civilian population, so... We are really doing
8 our part, to do whatever we can to help veterans with
9 all of the issues that they have and the ones that we
10 have control over, we will make sure that we address
11 those.

12 JUAN VARELA: If you guys could increase
13 the funding for those programs, that would be
14 wonderful. It's basically what's mostly needed.

15 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: That's what we're
16 fighting for. So thank you very much for your
17 support and your testimony. And thank you to over
18 veterans who made it today.

19 [Background talk]

20 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay. So we're
21 going to proceed with the hearing. We have several
22 speakers who have signed up to testify in relation to
23 Resolution 200. The parade resolution. A tickertape
24 parade in honor of the returning service members.
25 They are Ryan Lutz. Is this on the buy back?

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UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay are we doing buyback now?

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay, we'll mix them. But why don't we start first with Vincent McGowan, from United War Vets, Kevin Harrington from Transport Workers Union, and Ryan Lutz also in support and Marvin Holland from Transport Workers Union. If we could have the four gentlemen take their seat at the dais.

It's a busy hearing today. But an important one. How are you?

[Background talk]

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: So we have Marvin, Vincent, Kevin and Ryan. We're just waiting for Mr. Harrington.

[Pause]

[Background talk]

[Pause]

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Excuse me Mr. Chairman.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Yes.

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UNIDENTIFIED MALE: I would like to give my spot to one of my co-workers.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Yes. Of course. Do you want to acknowledge or give them a seat at the dais?

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: I want them to have the seat.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay. By all means. That's fine. By all means.

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay. Why don't we start with Mr. McGowan first. Because you're speaking on the parade reso. Right?

[Background talk]

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: And I believe the other three speakers are on the buyback bill. Is that correct?

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: So then we'll have Mr. McGowan, we'll have you and then we'll go to Mr. Harrington and the gentleman from the Transport Workers Union. I don't know your name but you'll identify yourself when we call you up to speak

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2 So Mr. McGowan, if you could turn the
3 mike on and speak when you're ready.

4 VINCENT MCGOWAN: Mr. Chairman thank you
5 for the opportunity to address the issue of a welcome
6 home parade. I think the timing of this conversation
7 is really astute with the rejuvenated fleet week and
8 the Memorial Weekend that we are participating in, in
9 New York City. So people are paying attention to it
10 and thank you again for giving us a chance to speak
11 to it.

12 My name is Vincent McGowan. I am the
13 President of the United War Veterans Council. The
14 United War Veterans Council works with the different
15 departments of New York City to create events all
16 over New York City that honor service. And our
17 particular signature event is the New York City
18 Veterans Day Parade which is broadcast nationally in
19 20 cities and in 10 markets from the east coast to
20 the west coast and north to south. By my testimony
21 today, is that our country's largest city, New York
22 City, where the 9/11 attacks occurred is the fitting
23 location to honor the expected returning U.S.
24 military veterans from their fields of operation on
25 the war on terror. Our great city became known for

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2 its famous tickertape parades beginning 1880 honoring
3 the dedication of the Statute of Liberty.

4 Subsequently, there have been dozens of both planned
5 and impromptu parades honoring important events in
6 our country's history and significant individuals who
7 have impacted our culture. An example of the
8 impromptu parades would be the Vietnam Welcome Home
9 Parade in 1985 which I was one of the organizers of.

10 That's how I actually got into the business of
11 putting on events in New York City that honor
12 service. The Operation Enduring Freedom A, is one of
13 4 OEF engagements. Other theaters are in Africa and
14 in the Philippines. What we're talking about here is
15 the Welcome Home Parade for Operation Enduring
16 Freedom A, which is Afghanistan. I think we have to
17 be clear that when the President calls for the
18 reduction in hostilities that there will still be
19 combatants in the field and other theaters and we
20 don't want to be part of confusing the American
21 public about why we are coming home when we're still
22 out there. But we do have to start the process of
23 ratcheting down these wars and bringing our people
24 home. There's no choice in that, sequestration and
25 the budget, are going to do it for us. So it's about

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2 how we're going to react to that and how we're going
3 to educate our citizens.

4 Operation OEF is scheduled to be
5 completed this year, 2014 and it signals the winding
6 down of our country's longest war. New York City has
7 over 250,000 veterans that your committee, and I
8 really appreciate all the good energy that's been
9 coming out of the short term of this committee so
10 far, but it's been very significant and very much
11 appreciated. We have five ports surrounding our
12 harbor and one of our nation's premier military
13 schools, West Pointe, just up river. Along with
14 Merchant Marine Academies, multiple air fields and
15 deactivated naval facilities, the city is an ideally
16 suited and justified as the site of the country's
17 most devastating terrorist attacks to host a Welcome
18 Home Parade in New York City to herald the end of
19 hostilities.

20 So what would we do? On November 11th,
21 the Veteran's Day Parade, this year is the 95th
22 consecutive Veteran's Day Parade in New York City.
23 This would be our target date under the plan that
24 we've been working with, with Senator Schumer for the
25 welcome home parade. The New York City Veteran's Day

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Parade is a nationally televised event that currently reaches into 20 markets nationwide, from San Diego to Boston and from Miami to Seattle. The parade route would be through the Canyon of Heroes on Lower Broadway. The beginning and the end of the parade would have to be worked out with the New York City Office of Citywide Events, New York Police Department and the Downtown Alliance. So we would find the right route and figure out the logistics of where we would put this still unknown number of people that we would be handling.

On the copies that I've turned in, the top line didn't come in the printing, but what it says is that the United War Veterans Council is a 501(c)(19), which is separate than all your others. And the not-for-profit corporation has been dealing with this event and other events that honor service since 1986 when we took over the responsibilities for creating and producing our nation's salute to veterans from the New York County American Legion. UWVC, the United War Veterans Council is a self-funded operation that supports the events is produces to individual and corporate financial donations and through a recycling program that we operate in all

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2 five boroughs in cooperation with the Department of
3 Sanitation and we have in the past submitted
4 testimony to the Department of Sanitation in Mr.
5 Williams', he chairs that committee, and we've
6 expressed our opinion on how the recycling is going
7 and how it might be improved by incorporating the
8 energy and the expertise of the operational talent
9 that we have in the veterans community.

10 UWVC is well known to our city agencies
11 and has a long record of being able to contribute all
12 of the activity..., or coordinate all the activity
13 between the various city agencies, the branches of
14 the military and with the United States Department of
15 Defense and the Pentagon. We've actually worked with
16 the White House in the past, in this administration's
17 first four years, bringing the Horse Soldier memorial
18 that's going into the 9/11 memorial into New York
19 City. Making it all happen and financially making it
20 stable so that it didn't cost the taxpayers any
21 money, but the community got the full benefit of the
22 honors and the citizens got the full opportunity to
23 see what the veterans community can do.

24 So why is this a good idea at this time?
25 We are winding down our country's longest engagement

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in combat and our citizens are fatigued and in need of the beginning of closure. We really feel from our activity, particularly in the city, people are supporting the veteran's community, but this has been a long drawn out affair and our sense of it is that people are ready to move on and find, you know..., bring people home and get into a more normal set of circumstances for their living. As a nation we are in the process of reducing our fighting forces and it is appropriate we realize these honorable men and women with a sincere thank you from a grateful nation. The plans for the November 11, 2014 are already in place. Our permits are in place for our parade this year. Our insurances are in place. Our literature is already out. We already have over 240 units signed up to be in the parade this year. So we have the makings of it. But it's very specific. Our testimony is very specific to November 11th, on Veterans Day.

The UWVC self-funds the events it produces to honor service and would increase our efforts to include the added responsibility of funding this national event. I've done a quick back of the envelope budget on this and counting on a

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40,000 to 50,000 person event, we would probably with the transportation needed after a somewhere between \$5 and \$7 million to put this together and I've already spoken to some of our really patriotic senior members of New York finance and particularly the manufacturing fields. And I don't feel that it would be a problem raising this money if the city wants to do it. And the mayor has already indicated that he was in support of this.

And most importantly, I think and I'll conclude my testimony with this, is a quote from General George Washington who was inaugurated right down here in Lower Manhattan, very appropriate. And his quote was "The willingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war no matter how justified, shall be directly proportional to how they perceive veterans of earlier wars were treated and appreciated by our nation". And I think that sums it up. Thank you very much for this opportunity to testify.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you again for your testimony and I want to put a plug in on a somewhat related matter for my Veterans Job Fair which you know I'm hosting this Sunday in Queens, in

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my district. We have over 50 vendors signed up and committed, they are coming. What I have asked these companies, is if you're not hiring, please don't come. I only want companies that want to hire veterans. Any veteran, Vietnam era, if people from Korea are still able bodied and want to work, God love them, and God bless them, we'd love to have them but, all the way up to today, the returning service members that are coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan face a new set of issues related to mental health, housing, unemployment, so many. This is one way which we are able to do something about it and so we're having that job fair this Sunday. The Speaker is coming. The council is participating. The City Council, the central staff will be there as well as so many wonderful partners from the private and public sectors. So please get the word out. Any veteran who needs a job or wants a job, maybe they have a job and want a better job. Send them Sunday. It's free, it doesn't cost them a dime.

MR. LUTZ: Thank you again for your testimony. The gentleman next to you, if you could state your name for the record and...

[Background talk]

[Pause]

MR. LUTZ: Okay. Good afternoon everyone. My name is Ryan Lutz. I am from the New York City Small Business Development Center and I am here to testify on behalf of the tickertape parade for the veterans. And what I would like to say is that it's very fitting that because of the September 11th attacks that took place right here in New York City that we show some closure, not only to the city, but to our veterans and to our nation. For our veterans and their service that they gave to our country. And it would put that sense of closure in the minds of the American people because we have vets coming home suffering from the effects of war, PTSD, homelessness, joblessness, and we do have a Veteran's Day Parade but it's not celebrating this particular conflict in particular. Having this parade would definitely be a step in the right direction to show not only New Yorkers but other states that we do appreciate our veterans and that their service is recognized. That's all I wanted to say. Thank you

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you for your testimony. We appreciate the support of Small Business Services SVS and why don't we go to our

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gentleman here from TWU and then we'll conclude the panel with Mr. Harrington.

[Background talk]

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay, we'll come back to him. Okay, why don't we start, Mr. Holland, do you want to introduce your members.

MARVIN HOLLAND: I'm Marvin Holland. I'm the political director and a veteran of the Navy as well and I have already submitted written testimony, so I'll have my brother introduce himself and speak.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: It will be entered into the record. Thank you Mr. Holland.

LUIS OTERO: I am an army veteran. I name is Luis Otero from the Bronx. I served almost ten years in the military. I served from 1976 to 1979, got out, and served again from 1981 to 1985 and I'm just here in support of the pension buyback bill which I think I'm entitled to. If I choose to buy back those three years it would strongly help me and my family.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I want to thank you for your support. My grandfather recently passed away, was in the Navy and served right after the end of the Vietnam conflict. He was a city worker.

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Worked for HRA for 28 or 29 years. Was also not able to buy back his time that he had served in the Navy for those three years. Similar to the period of time which you also served. It really is unfair. They travelled the world. They could have been in a combat situation. There was a lot of turmoil going on around the world at the time. The communism and the cold war were in full swing and those cold war veterans, right now, are ineligible to buy back their time. We're not giving them anything for free. That is the ironic thing about this legislation, is that people, they've earned it, but they're going to pay for it. They have to physically pay for that time like anyone else would be able to but that we don't discriminate those veterans for their service to our country. They enlisted, many of them voluntarily. They were not drafted, but you know, they wanted to serve their country and fight for their country. And were willing to go to war if necessary. And they should be allowed to buy back that time for their pensions. They're now serving our city and our state in the public sector and in public service, whether for the MTA, for other city agencies or state agencies. We ought to allow them the opportunity to

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buy back. But we're hearing is that the state is going to pass it. We're very hopeful. But we're going to stay on top of them. We are going to pass this resolution very soon. So that Albany know that the City of New York, the council, the speaker and the veterans whom we represent are on the record. We want it passed. It's going to help a lot of veterans. So we're going to fight for you and for the pensions and the benefits of all veterans who served in the armed forces. So thank you for your testimony.

Mr. Harrington.

KEVIN HARRINGTON: Thank you Mr. Chairman and Madam Speaker. I'm Kevin Harrington, I'm Vice President of the Transport Workers Union. One of the Vice Presidents of the Transport Workers Union and I am the Chairman of the Veterans Committee and one of the few non-veterans on the committee.

I'd like to explain what we're actually asking for. Back in 2000 the state legislature passed a bill where the service in the military in certain conflicts could be bought back and added to their pension time. That bill did not cover many conflicts. It did not cover people who served in

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2 peace time. So people who served in Kosovo. We had
3 a member who was in the 82nd Airborne who got shot
4 at. He's not covered. People who are on the coal
5 that sit's out in our harbor are not covered. And
6 one of the glaring discriminations of this law is
7 this law as it currently sits is gender
8 discriminatory. Women were banned by law from combat
9 zones. So they could not get their campaign medals.
10 So they could not buy back their pension times. We
11 find that veterans start work later. And are older
12 than people in the same seniority because their time
13 spent in the service delayed their entry into the job
14 market. We find the bill discriminatory because it
15 says that if you served during the Vietnam conflict
16 and you served at home in America, you were not near
17 a war zone, you could get credit for buy back. But
18 if you were a peace time in America, you could not.
19 So we're saying that what we call this is the
20 veteran's equality bill. Soldiers, sailors and
21 airman who are serving in Afghanistan now are not
22 covered. When they come home, when they march in
23 that parade they will face discrimination on our job
24 by not being able to buy that time back. Veterans
25 need to buy that time back, because many of them

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2 suffer debilitating traumas and injuries that shorten
3 their work careers. So we saw in our union, that a
4 solution to this was to have what we call a Veteran's
5 Equality Bill. To treat all veterans regardless of
6 gender, the same. Regardless of what time they
7 served. So we went to and were speaking to William
8 Larkin who is a State Senator from Rockland County
9 and he agreed to write the bill and he did last year
10 and Assembly Woman Amy Paulin helped him. So, right
11 now we have a majority in the Senate. We have a
12 majority in the Senate Finance Committee. If it was
13 brought to vote now, if everybody who co-signed the
14 bill in the Senate voted yes, it would pass. We have
15 a majority in the Ways and Means Committee in the
16 Assembly. If it was brought to committee for a vote
17 today, everyone who co-signed it voted yes, it would
18 pass. This bill has universal bipartisan support in
19 both Houses. It is not a sectarian bill. It's a
20 bill to honor the vets. So we urge you to pass this
21 bill. We want you to know that the basis of this
22 bill is the federal definition of what a veteran is.
23 A veteran in the federal definition is not a veteran
24 by conflict. Not a veteran by gender. A veteran is
25 someone who served their country. So, if you support

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equality for women veterans and all veterans, you should support this bill. Military service is public and a veteran is a veteran. So we ask you to send a message to our Governor and State Legislator to pass this bill and end discrimination against veterans, both by time they served and by gender. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you for your testimony. We have another speaker who signed up. Giovanni Taveras, from the New York State Veteran Chamber of Commerce. Is he here? And you wanted to speak on the previous measure right? You were here to speak about the medal?

[Background talk]

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay, alright. So, we'll call up the final panel, but I want to thank you for your testimony and for coming to City Hall today and thank the Speaker of course. Thank you for coming.

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: So we have Mr. Giovanni Taveras. Marvin has opted not to speak. He had one of his members speak in lieu of himself. We have Kevin McCauley (phonetic) if he wishes to speak. Is he here? We have Andy Moreno, TWU from the Bronx.

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If he wishes to speak. And Mr. Luis A. Otero, also from TWU.

[Background talk]

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Oh, that was you, I apologize. We already had you deliver testimony and we thank you for that testimony. When you're ready, state your name in the microphone and please give us your testimony.

GIOVANNI TAVERAS: Good afternoon. My name is Giovanni Taveras from the New York State Veterans Chambers of Commerce. I'm also an Ambassador for the Iraq/Afghanistan Veterans Association for the RRR program - The Rapid Response Referral Program which helps veterans with homelessness, GI benefits, and so on so forth. I just want to make a statement concerning the job fairs. I've been to a variety of the veteran job fairs. I know that you're holding one on Sunday. I'm signing up to be there, but I wanted to make reference to the Hilton hiring 10,000 veteran's affair that they had a couple of weeks ago at the Hilton. And 80% of those jobs were basically bartending and custodian services. I didn't know if you knew that, but I wanted to throw that out there.

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Also, at the Recruit Our Military Job Fair yesterday for veterans. There were a variety of tables. Two hours into the event that were still empty. I made to make postings of that. I also sent a twitter feed to the first one that I saw which, was the FDNY. For them to have a table there and not have anyone show up and the entire place was packed with veterans. But they were not there. Just wanted to make that statement and I'll see you on Sunday.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: And I want to assure you, if you know anything about my personality, that I have been tenacious to say the very least and very aggressive in recruiting vendors who want to hire veterans. And they run the gamut. We are very pleased that we have the participation on Sunday. A lot of wonderful employers who pay very good wages, with benefits, just to name a few, Madison Square Garden is coming. They..., most of those jobs are union jobs. Helmets to Hardhats is coming. So for the returning service men and women, who just left active duty within the past year, they can go directly into an apprentice program. And get a good paying union job as a plumber, as a carpenter, as a steamfitter. Making \$50 to \$60 an hour with

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benefits. I mean, it's a game changer. It's a life changer for them. We have, well I just handed some of the other participants. We also have partners from the financial sector. Banking industry, social service industry, healthcare, Flushing Hospital. We want to really team up people who have very unique skills or levels of education that they've got from their military careers and also from prior or after their military careers and connect them with those employers. Ferraro Brothers, Teamsters Union Shop. We have GE Aviation. Lockheed Martin, major defense contractor. If they don't hire veterans I don't know who will. They are committed to coming. They'll be there too. Home Depot's coming. The Intrepid Sea and Air and Space Museum. They had a big gala last night I couldn't make it. I met with the CEO last week. I said please come. Hire a veteran. Whatever vacancies you're posting online, consider hiring a veteran for those jobs. Some of those jobs, they are uniquely qualified for and they would be great for. Local 3, Madison Square Garden. Let's see, Bancorp. We have some not-for-profits locally in Queens and outside that are hiring. Families for Autistic Children. The New York Mets. We met with Will Pond

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(phonetic) about a month ago. He's better at hiring veterans that he is hiring pitchers, that's for sure.

[Laughing]

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: But we told the Mets, you want to support the veterans? We're so grateful for everything that you do. Hire a veteran. Hire a veteran. It could be for a security job. It could be for a grounds keeping job. It could be for your PR specialist. It could be for an office job. It could be for third base coach. It could be for anybody. Hire a veteran. They're coming. They're participating on Sunday. Helmets to Hardhats we mentioned. Who else? Russo's on the Bay who gave us the room for free. His son was a veteran, is a veteran. He's going to hire veterans that day. This is not going to be a job fair where we give people the run around. I'd rather have fifty confirmed employers who want to hire veterans and who are going to hire veterans than have a hundred people who are there for the good PR. That's the purpose that we're having this job fair. We had a hearing, we talked about the unemployment rate. We're very grateful for the job fairs that have occurred in Manhattan, in Brooklyn and in other places. Queens has the largest

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2 veteran's population out of all five boroughs. I'm
3 the Chairman of the Committee. I represent a
4 committee in Queens. Guess where the job fair is
5 taking place? In my district in Queens.

6 Now as far as the outreach. We send out
7 in my newsletter, 80,000 pieces of mail and the back
8 panel was the ad for the job fair. We took out an ad
9 in every single Queens paper, half page ad. The
10 Chronicle, the Forum, the Courier, the Times Ledger.
11 What other papers here? We have all the papers in
12 this week letting them know. We put it on Facebook.
13 We put it on Twitter. We mailed it to every VSO in
14 the city. We have done everything short of you know,
15 dragging these people out of their homes. We want
16 any veteran in New York City or from anywhere, to
17 come to this job fair, to try to get a job or get a
18 better job than the one they have not. That's the
19 purpose. And some people said it was inconvenient to
20 have it on a Sunday on Memorial Day weekend. I don't
21 think there was a better time to have it. Then to
22 have it on Memorial Day weekend. And I don't think
23 that anyone would object to the fact that if you
24 really want to pay tribute to those who made the
25 ultimate sacrifice in defense of our freedoms and our

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country. We should be helping their fellow comrades who made it back and who are struggling to support themselves and their families. So we're doing our part. That's my point. We advertised it. We paid a tremendous amount of money to advertise it. And we locked down fifty people who are really hiring. And I don't want anyone to leave on Sunday, saying that they were discouraged in any way.

By the way, why are we having at Russo's on the Bay? First of all it's a beautiful catering hall. I want veterans to walk into this building and feel like someone actually cared enough about them to have it in a really nice place. We weren't having it in a warehouse. We weren't having it in a school gymnasium. You know, where we schlep them in and schlep them out. We're putting them in a beautiful building. We know that they're going to come dressed for success. They're going to come prepared with their resumes. We want them to feel that day that if they applied for ten or twenty jobs, that they're going to get a phone call or maybe they were hired on the spot. That's the intent of this job fair. And I hope that this will become an annual event. That it will get bigger and bigger. And as long as I'm able

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to, I will continue to do it and hopefully we can help a lot of men and women who need it. So thank you for your feedback and we will see you there on Sunday. We are looking forward to it. Sir.

ANDY MORENO: My name is Andy Moreno. I am a vet. I served in the Army for 18 years. Most recently I am a bus driver for the MTA and I'm here on behalf of the union. I speaking about buying back the time from serving in the military. Also thanking you for all the help that you have supported for the veterans and the upcoming job fair. I am very aware of it. In regard to buying back the time, I think it is very important for all of us to understand, not just the people wants to buy the time for any particular reasons. Like for myself, it is very important. I only have worked in the MTA pretty much right now for six years. I got hurt overseas. I got medically discharged from the military. Right now I am trying to go back to work but because of my disabilities I haven't been able to. If I am allowed to buy the three years back from the MTA, I would have been able to actually retire. Complete my ten years and actually retire and receive a paycheck. Right now I am disabled and I'm not allowed pretty

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much to go back to work. It's just the disadvantages that we have while I was working in the private sector. I was in the reserve. I got called back.

[Pause]

Sorry.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: You take your time.

[Pause]

ANDY MORENO: I was sent to the war two times while I was a bus driver. I got home back from the military. I was not allowed to get out. It's just hard right now. I'm trying to recover and get back to work. My family is suffering a lot. We are running. I'm so sorry. This is not just me trying to make it for myself, but my family has been suffering for a long time because I got hurt. If I'm going through this I know that there has to be other people that are going through the same thing in the city. So I just think it is very important for a lot of people to be able to buy the time back. There are so many ways that people could help. There's a lot of things that we have given to the city, and to the country and I'm proud of it but, unfortunately the situation that I fall in, I know there is a lot of

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people who are also going through the same thing. So that's all I want to say. Thanks for the help.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I want to thank you for your testimony and thank you for your service to our country and to our city. And for your hard work. It does not go unrecognized and we are doing our part to do everything we can to help. That I can assure you. Thank you for your testimony.

Do we have any other speakers that have signed up? Okay. So we're going to wrap up this hearing of the Veteran's Committee. We will follow-up before the next stated and we will notify all of our friends in the veteran's community about any action that's taking place on any of the measures. I believe that the Resolution on recognizing the 65th Regiment is on the agenda for the next stated. Which is what day? The 29th of May. So on the 29th we are voting and I am going to do my part to push for the buyback resolution. I would like to see that on the agenda for the 29th too. Just because I want to make sure we do it before Albany does. Which is kind of ironic if you think about it, because it's very rare that Albany beats anybody in terms of passing anything. Anyway, that's my opinion. I can say

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that. I ran for State Legislature once, so. I want to thank everyone for coming down and testifying. I want to encourage everyone to help spread the word about the job fair on Sunday. I want to thank all of our service members who served in the armed forces. I want to remind all New Yorkers that freedom is not free. That some people paid the price of freedom. And that we pray for their souls, we pray for their families, we support their families. We should be there for them. And we should remember them, not only on Memorial Day, but every day, but that for the living, for the people who are still here living in the greatest country that God has ever created on the face of the earth. We owe it to our veterans to do everything we can to help them and we're doing our best. So thank you very much and the meeting is adjourned.

[Gavel]

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 05/31/2014