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**RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO DELIVERS REMARKS BEFORE VETERANS' ISSUES  
ROUNDTABLE**

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Thank you so much. We are really thrilled to have you here. It is an honor for us at City Hall, and I hope you've gotten a sense already of the history of this building. This place is extraordinary, but you really – you bring more honor to us being here and we appreciate it. And there's a lot of feeling in this town. I think people know that this is a city that has done so much over the years to contribute to our armed forces. We're very proud of the Brooklyn Navy Yard and its history – one of the great facilities of World War II – now, an extraordinary economic hub for the city. We're proud of Fort Hamilton. We're proud of so many elements of our military history and so many people from this city who have served and continuing to this day.

So, Fleet Week means a lot of things to us. It is a – it's obviously one of those times in the year that people appreciate, as New Yorkers, that special things happen here. And it's something that people look forward to and families look forward to the opportunity to visit and see these extraordinary ships and honor the people who serve us. But it also is another reminder of you know, how much we honor people who serve. So, I wanted to say a couple of remarks – I know Loree is going to have a few things to say, which I appreciate. And then I want to hear from – your thoughts about some of the issues that I'm going to raise. And we would appreciate, you know, your thoughts and your guidance because obviously, when it comes to supporting those who have served – this is ongoing work and work that we all need to find ways to improve. So we want your guidance. So, you know, I want you to – obviously, I want to say that I hope – while you're here, and all the men and women who serve under you are here – that they're getting a chance to appreciate this city and experience it, because it's also a great moment for us, and all over the neighborhoods of the five boroughs, when members of our armed service come to visit, it's an exciting thing for people. So I hope people are getting all over and experiencing the city.

I mentioned our veterans affairs commissioner, Loree Sutton – formerly General Loree Sutton – who has done extraordinary work already, particularly knowledgeable and with an extraordinary history of particularly helping members of the armed services and veterans with their mental health challenges. So, it's one of the reasons you're here – is that we appreciate what you've done already and the way you're reorienting our efforts to be more effective in that direction. Admiral Davidson, thank you. And I want to thank all of the members of the Veterans Advisory Board. We've asked people from our community to help us constantly improve the work we do and I want to thank all of the members of the board who are here.

Very quickly – I have a family that is unusual and typical at the same time. Be it very unusual by today's standards, but absolutely typical for the generation that they came from. My parents had me a little later in life. They were both 44 years old when they had me, therefore, they were of course the World War II generation. Same with my wife – so we have our fathers – both, Army. My wife's father, Robert, served in Europe in World War II in France and Italy. My father, Warren, served in the Pacific in the Seventh Division in a number of places – Kwajalein and Lucian islands, Leyte Gulf – ultimately, Okinawa. And at the very, very end of the war, in one of the last days of any serious action, unfortunately, a Japanese soldier threw a grenade at him and he lost half his leg. And he carried that with him obviously, physically, mentally, and every way thereafter. And that's

one of the things that, for me, was a grounding experience – growing up with a father who I knew had been a hero and I saw do extraordinary things to just go about a normal life. You'd watch him walking down the street with his prosthetic leg and you wouldn't necessarily know. And he worked very hard at that. But years and years later, there would still be pieces of shrapnel coming out of that leg.

So, one great advocate for veterans here in this town said to me at one point – I hadn't put two and two together – but he said you know, World War II hasn't ended for your family. And I think that's true for so many families from so many wars and conflicts that that reality can linger. One of the things with my dad is that the understanding of mental health services obviously then was not what it is today. So he understandably carried a lot with him, especially coming out of the Battle of Okinawa, which we all know was one of the most horrific of all time. He didn't – smart as he was, he didn't know how to get some of the help I hope we can help people to get today. So that was very powerful – obviously, painful reality for our family, but something that taught me a lot about – not only our obligation to help but the complexities, the challenges. And in some cases, again, the commissioner is an expert on this – in some ways, trying to help our men and women understand what's available to them and to overcome some of the stigma that still attaches itself to mental health support.

Just to finish this story of family very quickly – as I've said, unusual family – well, the two mothers in the family also were in the war effort. My wife's mother served at the Springfield Armory in Massachusetts, and my mother was at the Office of War Information, which prepared information and broadcasts directed to countries that were controlled by the Axis powers. So, we obviously were steeped in this – again, great lessons, powerful examples, heroic examples, and a lot of pain, a lot of challenges, and a lot of things that didn't get addressed.

So look, I'll just finish up quick. I mean, we are really clear in this city that there's a whole new generation now coming out of Iraq, coming out of Afghanistan that has real needs and complex needs. There's some physical challenges that are different from the past because of what people, thank God, have been able to survive – obviously mental health challenges that are different or differently understood, but need support just as much. We're working on those fronts – health, mental health, jobs – a huge challenge for veterans and for their spouses. One of the things Loree always talks about is there are some veterans not in a position to work themselves, but getting their spouse a job is an equally good way to support them. So we have our workforce centers – this last year, 2,500 vets and their spouses were served. We've got 350 jobs out of that for them. We want to keep increasing that number. And we have found some very good response in the private sector in terms of willingness to dedicate jobs to veterans and their spouses, but that's still an area where we can do a lot more.

We are right now asking the state government in Albany to create more fairness in terms of pension opportunities for those who served in Afghanistan. Those who served in previous wars were given opportunities to attach their wartime service to their pensions to give them a better pension situation. That is not yet true for those who served in Afghanistan. We want to fix that, and we certainly don't think it's fair that, you know, individuals who were in one conflict are treated differently than those in another. So we want to fix that in Albany. And something we're very proud of – you know, the president's made a very powerful point about ending veteran homelessness – we've made the pledge – obviously as the biggest city in the country – that we will end veteran homelessness this year – by the end of this year. A lot of energy, a lot of resources are going into that. Again, we thank the commissioner for her great efforts, and our commissioner of homeless services has been devoted to that task as well. So that's a big piece of the equation.

And I mentioned mental health before – my wife is leading our mental health efforts in the city. And what we're finding – and again, I don't think this is a shock to anyone – is that when it comes to mental health for all residents of the city – I would say it's very true for veterans – we still have a very disconnected, not overly coherent, system of opportunities for mental health services. We're trying to create a single strategy as a city for addressing the mental health needs of our people. I think veterans will benefit greatly in that. I can only imagine – again, as someone who saw some of this in my own family – I can only imagine some of the challenges that our young men and women have who have just returned. We are trying to orient our mental health efforts to be a lot more seamless, a lot more available, and, again, there's this constant need to de-stigmatize. It's 2015, but the stigma is unfortunately just as clear. My wife likes to say, you know, no one hesitates to go to the doctor if

they have a broken ankle, you know? There is a hesitation to seek mental health services, and we have to keep overcoming that. And she's meeting, in fact, tomorrow with a number of family members, and, I think, some spouses of some folks who are visiting, and I hope some of your spouses, and talking about the effort that she's leading around mental health.

So, I just want to give you that quick overview. We want to obviously hear your thoughts. Let me start with – oh, I'm sorry. Let's start with the admiral. I thought I was going stage right – going stage left here.

[Laughter]

So, admiral, we deeply appreciate you extraordinary service to the country. And you didn't get that title easily. I know that took a lot of hard work. And we would love your thoughts obviously on Fleet Week, but beyond what you would advise us to think about as a city trying to contribute to the national effort to serve men and women currently in uniform, but also for those who have come back.

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