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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO, FIRST LADY MCCRAY DELIVER REMARKS
AT VETERANS DAY BREAKFAST AT GRACIE MANSION**

Commissioner Loree Sutton, Department of Veteran Services: Okay, y'all, here we are. It's Veterans Day again. We got the perfect day. My name is Loree Sutton. I am privileged to serve as the founding Commissioner for your New York City Department of Veteran Services.

Let me just – before we get started here, I just want to get a little sense of who we've got. Let's start out with, let's see – families. Families serve too. How many of you out there are courageous enough to have loved or are currently loving someone in uniform, has been in uniform? Raise your hands. Great, let's give it up for the families.

[Applause]

And of course, I am lucky that my own sweet [inaudible] shade of red. How many of you out there are civilian allies and friends whom we could not do this work without? Please raise your hands. Fantastic [inaudible] –

[Applause]

Okay, next, you know New York City became a Coast Guard city this year. I'm very excited about that. Any Coasties out in the audience? There you go [inaudible] –

[Applause]

And now, who's aiming high? Where are our Air Force folks out there? Okay, we've got [inaudible] –

[Applause]

Looking for some Navy sailors. Navy?

[Applause]

And what about the 243rd Birthday for those Marines?

[Applause]

And now for our honored branch of service this year, where are those Army for [inaudible] soldiers out there?

[Applause]

Alright, one other quick slice of who we have in our audience – who out here has served post-9/11? Please, raise your hands. There you go, post-9/11.

[Applause]

Who has served in the 80s and 90s? That would be Grenada, that would be First Gulf War, the Balkans?

[Applause]

I'm looking now for our Vietnam veterans. Raise your hands and welcome home all of you.

[Applause]

Do we have some Korean War veterans in the house? Korean War, right here.

[Applause]

And now, I'm looking for World War II [inaudible] Howard Zwemer –

[Applause]

Okay, now that we've got you all warmed up, it's a cold day but we're – our hearts are warm and it's my distinct honor and privilege to introduce our first guest speaker today, Chirlane McCray, First Lady of New York City. You know, she has completely reinvented that role through her pioneering work in creating ThriveNYC which is the most comprehensive mental health plan in any town, any city, any state in the country.

If that's not been enough, she's gone on to bring on other cities – mayors from nearly 200 cities, who have joined up in the Cities Thrive coalition to transform the way we think about mental health, the way we talk about it, what we do about it, how we prepare for it, and how we just overcome that stigma and make it the most natural thing ever to seek help when needed.

As an old Army soldier psychiatrist, you know that warms my heart, so please join me in a warm welcome for First Lady of New York, Chirlane McCray.

[Applause]

First Lady Chirlane McCray: Good morning, everyone.

Audience: Good morning.

First Lady McCray: Welcome to Gracie.

[Applause]

Welcome. Friends, families, veterans, civilians, allies, all of you – this is your home and you are always welcome here. I want to thank you, Commissioner Brigadier General Sutton, for all you do. I don't know what you drink in the morning but I really want to bottle it. I love her energy. Please give her a round of applause.

[Applause]

Now, most of you may know that Dr. Sutton is a New York – she is New York City's most fierce veteran for veterans, I'm sorry – most fierce advocate for veterans and their families but what you may not know is that she also served as the highest ranking psychiatrist in the U.S. Army.

[Applause]

So, she understands more than most the trauma that so many of our service members carry around with them. She understands that soldiers often return home with wounds that cannot be seen from the outside, and she knows the toll that chronic worry and anguish can take on their loved ones.

My own father almost never talked about his experiences in World War II but he did have intense periods of sadness and would sometimes not talk to us for days and days at a time, totally isolating himself from us. His moods were pretty unpredictable and my younger siblings and I pretty much tiptoed around him because we were kind of afraid of – we were afraid of him and afraid of what he might do.

And I have to say as a child, I did not know what to make of his behavior. I really didn't. It was sometimes sad, sometime intimidating, but I know now that his behavior was not unique. He had a lot of pain locked up inside of him that didn't have to stay there.

And today there is so much that we can do, so much that we must do for all of our brave veterans and their families. In New York City we're doing so much more than ever before. We've helped hundreds of struggling veterans find homes because healing cannot begin until the most basic of needs are met.

We've connected veterans and families to behavioral health services and to peers who have lived experience with what veterans are going through. And because there are so many different ways to heal we have even tapped into the therapeutic power of art through an exciting program called Theater of War.

[Applause]

Some of you know about Theater of War. Well, in partnership with the Department of Veteran Services, Theater of War has staged free stage performances across the five boroughs. They present plays that focus on timeless themes that resonate with veterans and military families with urgency and exhilaration to depression and despair to patriotism and service.

And I want you all to know about this program because programs like Theater of War are truly captivating, entertaining, and instructional and can be a powerful force in fighting the stigma around mental illness and substance misuse. We're exploring doing much more with the Theater of War going forward because of the response that we've received from veterans and their families.

And we want to make sure we reach every veteran where they are and make sure that every veteran knows that they are not alone.

[Applause]

In New York City, there is always help available and anyone who wants to talk with someone in confidence can call 1-888-NYC-WELL at any time, day or night, and speak with a trained counselor for free.

That's 1-888-NYC-WELL. Will you help me spread the word?

Audience: Yes.

First Lady McCray: Will you say the number with me?

Audience: Yes.

First Lady McCray: 1-888-NYC-WELL

Audience: 1-888-NYC-WELL

First Lady McCray: Thank you. And now, it is my great privilege to introduce a leader who is so deeply committed to serving those who have served us, our very own Mayor, Bill de Blasio.

[Applause]

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, everybody.

Audience: Good morning.

Mayor: Welcome. Welcome to Grace Mansion. This is the People's House. It belongs to all of us. So, we are so honored to have you here on this important day. And I want to say a thank you

to everyone here, everyone who has served, everyone who is serving, everyone who supports our troops and our veterans.

This is a labor of love for all of us and we are gathered here together to honor so many who have served. I would like you to do me one favor – because everyone here cares, everyone here has contributed – please give a round of applause to your neighbor.

[Applause]

And I want to thank our First Lady because as you can hear, she has made the fight to bring mental health to the fore of our public discussion. She has made it her passion and her life's work to make sure that folks who have mental health challenges get the support they need.

And nowhere is that more important than with our veterans. We need to be there for them especially when it comes to mental health needs that so often were stigmatized absolutely unfairly. And I want to thank our First Lady for all she has done. Let's give her a round of applause.

[Applause]

I also have to thank our shy and retiring, low-energy master of ceremonies –

[Laughter]

I call her Low-Energy Loree.

[Laughter]

See, other people can use nicknames too.

[Laughter]

Loree Sutton, I'm looking forward to the day when I walk up to Loree Sutton and I say, "How are you doing today, Loree." And she says, "Oh, okay."

[Laughter]

I haven't had that day yet. But whether you call her Commissioner Loree Sutton or whether you call her General Loree Sutton, she has done extraordinary work for this city and this country. Let's thank her for all she has done.

[Applause]

We've got a lot of great folks behind me. I want to acknowledge them. And the first one I want to acknowledge actually has the very special role of providing direction and supervision for

Loree Sutton. And that takes a man of great strength and character – Deputy Mayor Phil Thompson, thank you.

[Applause]

Commissioner and Chief Judge of OATH Fidel Del Valle, thank you.

[Applause]

Commissioner for the Mayor’s Office to End Gender Based Violence, Cecil Noel, thank you.

[Applause]

Homeless Services Administrator Joslyn Carter, thank you and thanks for all you do for our veterans who have been homeless to help them no longer be homeless.

[Applause]

Human Resources Administrator Grace Bonilla, thank you.

[Applause]

I want to thank the elected officials who are with us. Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer.

[Applause]

Assemblymember Michael Blake.

[Applause]

Council Member Chaim Deutsch.

[Applause]

Thank you all.

[Applause]

And everyone who has been acknowledged does a lot of good but the person I’m going to acknowledge now has done something truly historic, truly heroic. You know very, very few people in the history of the republic have been granted the Medal of Honor. And those who have did something for their fellow soldiers that all of us can only begin to imagine the difficulty, the bravery that was involved.

And thank God he is here with us. Medal of Honor Recipient Captain Flo Groberg. Thank you. Flo Groberg, right there. Put your hand up again, Flo. Thank you.

[Applause]

Captain, I asked you where you were from – and born in France, you said. And I think you said you were in Chicago, now you're in Seattle, but I consider you a New Yorker. You're always welcome here.

[Applause]

This is a particularly poignant Veterans Day. It puts in perspective how the long the recognition has been in our history of the need to honor our veterans and to recognize their service because literally this is the 100th anniversary of the end of what was called the Great War or the War to End All Wars.

World War I ended 100 years ago at the 11th hour of 11th day of the 11th month, 1918.

I want people to understand and to honor people we never knew in our generation but we know some of them through history and we have to hold them in our hearts. New York – New York State sacrificed the most of any state in the entire union. We lost almost 14,000 New Yorkers in that war, and a grand total of half-a-million New Yorkers served in that conflict.

Thank you – they're letting me know we've also been joined by Councilmember Mathieu Eugene. Thank you, Councilmember.

[Applause]

So on the 11th of November, we remember. And now a century has passed and that war to end all wars, we all know now, it was not the last war, and we know our armed services are ready, and we pray that they will never have to have another war.

But we also know that our veterans became part of the fabric of our society, and yet our society did not understand fully enough how to support our veterans. So, this is a day where I hope we recommit ourselves to our veterans and to their families.

And I want to take this moment to ask you to all applaud the Gold Star families who are with us, to offer our thanks.

[Applause]

To all the members of the military who are with us today, I want to remind you of something we're very proud of. This is the greatest city of veterans in the entire country – 200,000 veterans in this city. And we know it is our obligation every day to go farther in helping them. We know gatherings like this, ceremonies, moments of remembrance matter a lot but the actual things we do tangibly to help our veterans matter even more. And that's why we are so proud that in this city we created the first ever New York City Department of Veteran Services, and thank you General Sutton.

[Applause]

Now, we know we keep having to do more for our veterans, so, I have some breaking news for you. I gotta get one of those graphics to come up – breaking news. We haven't figured out how to have that come up in front of me but you can visualize it in your mind.

I am proud to official launch a new resource that will help to change the lives of our veterans here in New York City and given them the support they need. It's called VetConnectNYC. VetConnectNYC is a one-stop portal. If a veteran needs help finding a job – by the way every employer out there, when you hire a veteran, you hire a quality person who will make your business better.

[Applause]

So, VetConnectNYC, you go there if you need help finding a job, if you need help with health services be they mental health or physical health services, if you need help finding housing – one stop to give our veterans the support they deserve.

You can get that by going online – VetConnectNYC.org or by calling 3-1-1. You know, we need to make it easy. Our veterans have given us so much. Their families have given us so much. We need to make it easy. This is going to be, from now on, the simplest way for our veterans to get the help they deserve. And I want to thank the whole team at the Department of Veteran Services for putting together this whole new resource for our vets. Thank you.

[Applause]

I want to conclude with just a personal note before welcoming a very special guest. Chirlane mentioned her dad's service in World War II in the Army in Europe. My dad served in the Pacific in World War II. As Chirlane said, her dad was reticent to talk about it and we know a lot of those who have served in combat have that reality. My dad would talk about his service sometimes.

For my dad it was impossible not to. He lost half his leg on Okinawa and that framed – that moment in his life framed so much of what he went through thereafter physically and emotionally. I'm also proud to say that our moms served in the war effort. Chirlane's mom served at the Springfield Armory in Massachusetts. My mom served in the Office of War Information here in New York City.

So, our entire family was involved in the war effort of World War II. And from that we got to see the nobility and the heroism and the sacrifice and we also got to see the pain, and that has spurred us on to do all we can because when we think of the veterans today who need help, we think about our own parents.

Chirlane's dad, Robert. My dad, Warren. We think about what they went through but back then there was no place to turn if your challenge happened to be mental health. No one even knew

how to talk about it. There was no place to turn [inaudible] that pain, that struggle they carried with them and often it held them down.

Today, the resources are there thanks to folks like General Sutton who pushed hard in her service in the Army to make sure there were more mental health services available for active-duty officers let along veterans, thanks to Chirlane who has done so much to de-stigmatize the challenge of mental health in this city and this country. But I will tell you something that's cautionary.

As people around New York City got to know that Chirlane was a great champion for a variety of services to those with mental health challenges, more and more people have come up to her at the end of an event or when she's out on the street, wherever, and talk to her but I noted a pattern. They had often wanted to pull her aside away from everyone else or they would speak in whispered tones because there is still a stigma about mental health – 2018, a hundred years after World War I, we still can't talk about it the way we need to.

We aren't going to heal and we're not going to serve all our veterans until we can bring this out in the open and feel comfortable talking about something that's part of the human condition. So, I ask everyone here – everyone of us can be a part of that, telling people about 888-NYC-WELL, telling them there's no shame in having a challenge.

There's only shame in not getting the help because every veteran and their family deserve it. So, we need to carry that spirit with us and we need to be part of making sure that help is there for all.

Well, I now have a particular honor because we get to have some very special guests on Veterans Day in New York City, and this is a man who has served our nation with great distinction and now is providing leadership at the Pentagon as he continues his extraordinary career in the military. We had a great talk with him before and he is someone who understands both the physical health and mental health challenges that our armed services face, and he's doing something about it. I want to commend him and thank him for that.

My honor to introduce to you the Vice Chief of Staff of the United States Army General James C. McConville.

[Applause]

[...]

Commissioner Sutton: Thank you so much General McConville, Mr. Mayor, First Lady, What a day. What a day, and particularly, while every day of the year is Veterans Day at the Department of Veterans Services, it's never more special than when it's actually Veterans Day and when we have two of our city's foremost veterans – former Mayor David Dinkins and Congressman Charlie Rangel.

[Applause]

Truly, we stand on the shoulders of giants, and I just have to take a moment to recognize all of my City colleagues behind me, elected officials, fellow commissioners, Deputy Mayor – please give them a round of applause.

[Applause]

The Mayor mentioned that we've [inaudible] up the Department of Veterans of Services – first city in the country to do so. Can I just have a hand-up – every member of Team DVS, please raise your hand across the audience. Thank you so much.

[Applause]

You also heard the Mayor announce the launch of VetConnectNYC. This partnership, it's lead through the Institute for Veteran and Military Families. We got Jim McDonough right here, Syracuse University – hold your applause, though, hang on, hang on.

We've got Unite Us Dan Brillman, CEO; we've got Northwell Health – that's the secret sauce. All roads lead to the coordination team. And I just want to – please, raise all of your hands who are here from VetConnectNYC. Thank you so much.

[Applause]

Lastly, today would not have been possible without the support of the Mets' Foundation. You just gotta keep believing, love those Mets.

[Applause]

And in a final nod to our senior service members, leaders in uniform – we have truly a joint team. In addition to General McConville, we've got Team Brilakis – Mark Andrew Brilakis, Marine Corp Forces Commander and his spouse, Kate. Where you at, Team Brilakis? There we go.

[Applause]

We've got Major General John Gordy II and his spouse right here. Please –

[Applause]

That would be [inaudible] here, Bernie. We've got Captain Jack Killman, Commander of the Navy. A special guest. Where are you, Captain Jack? There we go.

[Applause]

And lastly, we've recognized Flo Groberg. As the Mayor said, Flo, you're a New Yorker now. I would like to unite you with another special guest here today. We have from Maryland visiting us retired P-51 Mustang Pilot from World War II, Howard Zwemer, 95 years old. Please –

[Applause]

Truly, we are blessed. Thanks to everyone for being here, for being supportive of our veterans, their families, our allies. All of us are in this together. Now, let's go out there to that Veterans Day, America's Day Parade. Happy Veterans Day, New York City.

[Applause]

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