

# Transcript: Mayor Eric Adams Delivers Remarks at Fleet Week Kick-Off Breakfast Reception

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**Gregory Williams, Manager of Strategic Partnerships, Department of Veteran Services:** What's going on everybody? Welcome. Welcome. Listen. Welcome. She gave me a whoop. I like that. Welcome to the 2022 New York City Mayoral Fleet Week kick off breakfast. Alright, let's do a quick vocal. Where's my army folk at? Where's my army? Where's my marine corps at? Where's my air force at? Where's my coast guard? And where is the US Navy?

[Cheers]

**Williams:** All right. All right. I'm Greg Williams, manager of partnerships at the New York City Department of Veterans Services. We're going to get this show on the road. We are here for you. We are here to welcome you to New York City Fleet Week because nobody does it like New York City. All right.

**Williams:** Listen, we have 210,000 veterans that our agency services. If you didn't know, New York City is the only major city in America that services our veteran population. So give it up for that. Only major city in America. All right. Only major city where if you served one day outside of boot camp, you are considered a veteran. And also, our family members, our spouses. I got my mama in the crowd, I had to bring mama to the party. All of you are our family under one cloth. I want you to understand we are all under and a part of one cloth.

**Williams:** Now we're going to get this party underway. And I have to bring up my friend, my boss, the one that leads the charge in making sure that our homeless veterans have a place to go. Making sure that the veterans that need to put in a claim, they can do that. Making sure that student veterans, when they exhaust the GI bill, we look for grants and we help you. Point you in the right direction to get those services. The man that leads the charge with constituent services as well, all right, and our funeral benefits team. All right. We do so much at the agency, and we are here for all of you in the

crowd. But let's give it up, all right, for the commissioner of the New York City Department of Veteran Services, James Hendon, everybody.

[Applause]

**Commissioner James Hendon, Department of Veteran Services:** Thank you so much, Greg. Good morning, everybody. Welcome to Gracie Mansion. In the 1940s, Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia used to call this place New York's little White House. We like to think of it today as the People's House here in New York City. Yep.

**Commissioner Hendon:** Now our sea service friends took care of us at the USS Baton yesterday. And this is the City of New York's turn to return the favor. So before we begin, just want to acknowledge some generous organizations here today that made this entire event possible. Want to call out our friends at U-Haul, our friends at the History Channel and Plant Next Door. Please give them a round of applause y'all.

**Commissioner Hendon:** I also want to acknowledge the teams at the Gracie Mansion Conservancy, the Mayor's Office of Special Projects and Community Events. And my team, our good people at the New York City Department of Veteran Services, the wind beneath my wings. These folks work tirelessly to get this event where it is today. Please give them a round as well.

**Commissioner Hendon:** And when you see anyone behind the scenes working this event, if you see the security people, if you see folks with food, if you see folks signing people in, please pull them to the side and say thank you, we appreciate what it took to get this thing done.

**Commissioner Hendon:** I also want to give out honors and salutations to our distinguished military leadership that is here in attendance. Yep. By name, we're going to call out Rear Admiral Scott Robertson, U.S. Navy Commander Carrier Strike, Group Two. Rear Admiral Charles Rock, U.S. Navy Commander Navy Mid-Atlantic Command. Rear Admiral Michael Wettlaufer, U.S. Navy, Commander Military Sealift Command. Vice Admiral Steve Poland, U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Coast Guard Atlantic. Vice Admiral Daniel Dwyer, U.S. Navy, Commander U.S. Second Fleet. Vice Admiral Kevin Lundy, U.S. Coast Guard, Deputy for Material Readiness to the Deputy Commandant for Mission Support. Lieutenant General Michael Langley, U.S. Marine Corps, Commander

U.S. Marine Forces Command. Admiral Darrell Carter, U.S. Navy Commander, U.S. Fleet Forces Command. Let's give them a round of applause everybody.

[Applause]

**Commissioner Hendon:** And I want to acknowledge my counterpart on the city side of things. As far as city veteran leadership, recognizing Wendy McClinton, chairwoman of the New York City Veterans Advisory Board. We see you. We see you.

**Commissioner Hendon:** Now y'all, our elected officials and peers and government will be acknowledged by the mayor when he's on the mic. But last but not least, I want to make sure we recognize all of our service members and our veterans and those who love these people. To anyone who wears a uniform or who has worn the uniform or who considers yourselves an ally, please give yourselves a round of applause. And thank you so much for all that you do all.

[Applause]

**Commissioner Hendon:** At this time, we will have the presentation of colors accompanied by the singing of the national anthem, followed by an invocation led by Captain Wayne Hall, Navy Chaplain. Present the colors.

[Singing]

**Commissioner Hendon:** Let's give a round for our Color Guard and our National Guard singer. Come on, y'all. Yeah.

[Applause]

**Commissioner Hendon:** Now I welcome Chaplain Wayne Hall to lead our invocation.

[...]

**Commissioner Hendon:** A few minutes ago, I said, welcome to Gracie. I just want to add another welcome now that we formally started. The Navy, they said it yesterday,

and we as a city are saying it right now. Now that you're here at this mansion. Welcome, welcome, welcome to Fleet Week. This is our first-time celebrating fleet week in two years and it's been many more years since the last time we were here at this place at Gracie Mansion.

**Commissioner Hendon:** This event, this entire week, it highlights the fact that our maritime service branches are the guardians of our shores and protectors of peace around the world. Fleet Week affords us an opportunity to thank these sea service branches and their contribution throughout time. But it also allows us to recognize our sailors, our coast guardsmen, our Marines, and our Merchant Marines and their families as individuals. Recognizing that less than one half of 1% of all Americans serve and the sea services are a subset of that group. Saying this from a city where four out of our five boroughs are surrounded by water, you have chosen paths of service that are at the heart of what we're celebrating today, and we honor you for that.

**Commissioner Hendon:** So three things I'll say before we move on. One, none of you is here at Gracie Mansion right now by mistake. You all have a unique tie to this place. You see, before Archibald Gracie built the country house for which this property was named back in 1799, General George Washington commandeered a building on this very land during the Revolutionary War. The British ultimately destroyed it, but the terrain holds strategic significance because it overlooks hell's gate. Hell's gate, which the Dutch used to call hellegat, is a part of the East River that snakes around Queens into the Long Island Sound. It's a narrow tidal straight. If one wanted to attack New York City from the front door, you'd go through New York Harbor. But if you wanted to go through the back door with smaller vessels, you'd go here through Hells Gate.

**Commissioner Hendon:** Before anything else this land had naval... It was a naval choke point. So when we look at that aspect of the history, and then we fast forward to Archibald, who was a merchant building his property here and what we know as Gracie. We fast forward to Alexander Hamilton holding meetings of the New York Federalists here. We fast forward to this being designated the official home of the mayor of the City of New York. For more than 200 years, this site, the mansion and its surrounding land have been where military, business, political, and civic leaders from around the world have congregated. You too. Everyone here is a part of that long standing tradition. This is home for selfless servants, for innovators and the game changers. Every single person here belongs right now.

**Commissioner Hendon:** This brings me to my second point. To all who are not from here, please think of New York City as your home away from home. This place is the beating heart of it here at Gracie, but that expands out to all five boroughs. From Harlem and Manhattan to West Brighton, and Staten Island, to Flushing in Queens, to Sunset Park in Brooklyn, to Norwood in the Bronx, each of the approximately 283 neighborhoods located in this city across 59 community districts and five boroughs team with opportunity. Each team with diversity, team with acceptance and with warmth. The energy of this place, the comradery, the emotion, the resilience is something I personally have only seen in one other place in my life, and that is during my 20 years of service in the armed forces.

**Commissioner Hendon:** Speaking personally, and I know others who would say this, I'm not originally from here. I kept coming back to New York City when I was on active duty. I kept moving over and over again when I was in active status, but this place was like a center of gravity for me and I was drawn to it. I decided to stay. Whether or not you decide to stay, I encourage you to keep coming back to the city, even when you're not in uniform and it's not Fleet Week. Winter, spring, summer, fall. I say this from experience, speaking of New York and all that is within not just the government, but everything. She will not judge you. She will empower you. She will not look away from you. She will embrace you and your veteran identity. Also, when not if you fall down because all of us fall at some point, she will be there to pick you up with open arms. Think of us as an anchor for you and your families as you navigate the sea of life. This is a home away from home.

**Commissioner Hendon:** So speaking of home, this brings me to the third point. I'm talking about home. Let's also talk about some homework. Just want to assign this right now. I challenge everyone here. I challenge you to get to know at least three people you didn't know when you walked in here today. Now I'm not talking about I'm wearing the veteran hat. He's wearing the veteran hat. Let's talk. I'm not talking about I'm in uniform. She's in uniform, let's connect. For our allies, I'm not saying, I'm a veteran ally. Let just focus on my own. Look at somebody and say, "You know what? I know there's probably no way I might see this person ever again but for being here right now." Get yourself a speed date on. Exchange contact information, chat it up. Do what you do.

**Commissioner Hendon:** If we don't do that, if we don't connect like this, if we don't come together in these settings, if we're not intentional about these things, then we don't have a place that we can call a second home. We don't have a storied tradition where we can continue to get together at places like this and talk about how these

things tie us together. No free chicken as my grandma would say. Or in the case of today, no free, plant-based products. Using the sports analogy, everyone hits, no one quits we win. So I just ask you to just keep connecting, try to get three people in. I'm doing the same thing. I'm not going to tell you something I'm not going to do.

**Commissioner Hendon:** The most dangerous thing anyone ever did was put us in a room together or put us out here on Gracie lawn right now. If you think about it, I said all this in English using lots of words, I could have said it in Latin with a few words to get the same point across. For the Coast Guard I could have just said *semper paratus*. Always ready. For the Navy I could have said *non sibi sed patriae*, not self but country. For the US Marine Corps, y'all know where this is going. I could have said *semper fidelis*. Devil dogs. Always faithful. Then for the Merchant Marines, our brothers and sisters on that side, I could have just said *act non verba*, deeds not words.

**Commissioner Hendon:** So to summarize, number one, I'm a big fan of tell them what you're going to tell them. Tell them and tell them what you already told them folks who – military know what I'm getting at. No one here should have imposter syndrome today. This is your house. Step into your place in this story on your role, you belong here.

**Commissioner Hendon:** Number two, if ever you lose your compass and cannot find home, then let New York City be that center of gravity. That north star for you always. Consider this place home base. Number three, keep bringing people together even right now. Get that speed dating on y'all. Keep doing this as you expand your influence, and as we expand our collective influence and continue to lead. Not just as city, not just as country, but the world. So to end with a quote, we started talking about General/President George Washington. We're going to close out with Dwight David Eisenhower, also a general and the president.

**Commissioner Hendon:** "The eyes of the world are upon you. The hopes and prayers of liberty-loving people everywhere march with you." We're so grateful for you and all that you do, and all of your service. Happy Fleet Week, everybody. Thank you so much.

[Applause]

**Commissioner Hendon:** Next, we will have remarks from Admiral Daryl Caudle, U.S. Navy Commander, U.S. Fleet Forces Commander.

[...]

**Commissioner Hendon:** All right, now, I am very pleased to welcome to the stage captain, retired New York Police Department, state senator emeritus from New York's 20th district, where he served as the Senate Veterans Committee chairman, president emeritus, borough of Brooklyn, 110th mayor of the City of New York, and I'm going to say the mayor for American's veterans. Ladies and gentlemen, the honorable Eric Leroy Adams.

[Applause]

**Mayor Eric Adams:** Thank you, thank you. Thank you so much. And welcome to your home. I believe the commissioner was right. I feel at home. And if you're from out of town, I just want to add to his lists of request of please spend money. Please spend money. A lot of money.

**Mayor Adams:** It's been two years since we watched those, as coolest uniforms. You know, those white uniforms, man, I just want to wear one one day. Seeing you watch and march and walk through the streets and enjoy our city, welcome back. We're happy to have you here, and I want to say a special thanks to Emblem Health for their sponsorship. And thank you.

**Mayor Adams:** And senator, you should be up here. Come on and join a stool up here. One of our great citizens, [inaudible], represents The Bronx. And we owe so much of our recovery to the military, especially the Navy. As you know, the U.S.N.S. comfort provided by the medical assistance when we were at the epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic. So we want to say thank you. And military medical staff, active duty, National Guard, and military reserve members supported our vaccination process. You were everywhere, and we really appreciate it.

**Mayor Adams:** And it's a rich tradition that goes back over 200 years. And so, based on behalf of 8.8 million New Yorkers, we just want to say thank you. And we cannot say thank you enough. And we consider ourselves, this is a veteran friendly city, and we'll always be a veterans friendly city. And I'm proud to say that that is a label that we're going to hold onto and dear to our heart.

**Mayor Adams:** We're home to about 200 thousand, 210 thousand veterans and active duty service members right here in this city. Bay Ridge, I believe, is one of the largest live-in locations for our retired veterans. We are the only major city in the country where the municipal veteran services agency, Department of Veteran Affairs, is in place. We believe in not only talking about it, but being about it in a real way. As a former officer, I know how important it is to wear the uniform, to put service in front of yourself. I'm proud to highlight the veterans that served in the highest level of my leadership in this administration. Commissioner Louis Molina at the Department of Corrections. Commissioner Zach Iscol at Emergency Management. Commissioner James Hendon, who you just heard from at the Department of Veterans Services and my chief of staff, Frank Carone, who is from the Marines.

**Mayor Adams:** So Memorial Day is almost here and while we celebrate Fleet Week, we must never forget the many service men and women who have retired, placed their lives on the line for our country. I'm honored to celebrate it here today and just to say thank you. But also want to say that every time I hear the song that represents our country, there's one line that stands out the most for me. "Bomb bursts in air gave proof through the night that our flag is still there."

**Mayor Adams:** We've been through a lot, Americans. We watched throughout history. Bombs bursting in air is not the physical bombs, but it's also the crises that we experience. Everything from the Great Depression to Pearl Harbor, to the various flus, and pandemics and epidemics, to COVID, to watching our building of trade collapsed right in front of our eyes. But each time those physical and symbolic bombs burst, we continue to show the globe who we are.

**Mayor Adams:** We were hit hard with COVID-19 and remind me of September 11th as I watched those buildings of trade collapse. There was a question mark that lingered over our entire country, what would happen to America? Although we acknowledge the loss of lives on September 11th, the day I remember the most was September 12th. You got up. Teachers taught, builders built, retailers sold their goods, men and women of the armed forces went out to protect our country and our agencies became focused. We showed the level of resiliency of who we are.

**Mayor Adams:** As I look at COVID, COVID is not terrorism, but it brought terror. We lost loved ones. Oftentimes we dropped our family members off to the hospital, never to see them again. Businesses were decimated. Our children are experiencing the trauma



of losing two and a half years of their lives. Many of them did not enjoy proms, did not enjoy graduation. We didn't even see their smiles for many periods of time, but I know this country and trust me, just as we were the epicenter of COVID, epicenter of terrorism, we are now post and moving throughout this COVID process, we will get up again. We're resilient. I dare anyone to bet on America and think they're going to lose. That is not what we do.

**Mayor Adams:** We are a resilient country, and it troubles me when I look at a survey that states 50 something percent of Americans would not defend the country if we were attacked by foreign entities. We have to go back into our schools, go back into our offices, back into our streets and remind people who we are. There's no place on the globe that has dream attached to its name. There's no German dream, there's no French dream, there's no Polish dream, but damn it, there's an American dream. There's an American dream.

**Mayor Adams:** We should never, never forget that and that dream is reality. We sit under the tree of freedom because you water that tree with your blood. The greatest honor we can show is to understand. We must protect that dream. I've been in other countries. I lived in other places and I'm very clear I want to be right here. Right here where we defend the dream from every walk of life. Doesn't matter where you come from, what language you speak, there's a welcoming, warm heart in this country. Yes and we are not perfect. We have some good days and some bad days. We get things right and we get things wrong. But one thing's for sure. I believe in all my heart, this is God's country and we are children of God. We are going to protect everything that we stand for. Thank you very much. Welcome to Fleet Week.

**Mayor Adams:** So Admiral, if you will come up. We are acknowledging that we hereby proclaim this week, the 32nd year of Fleet Week in New York City. Thank you very much.

**Mayor Adams:** Before we close, bring up senator, one of our great leaders to say a few words before we depart. Senator Sepúlveda.

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