



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
NEW YORK, NY 10007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: August 18, 2014

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No. 405

**RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPOINTS LOREE SUTTON
COMMISSIONER OF THE MAYOR'S OFFICE OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS**

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good afternoon everyone. It is a great pleasure to be here with my colleagues in government. The Chair of the City Council's Committee on Veterans Affairs, Eric Ulrich, thank you so much for joining us. And a good friend who has put a lot of energy into the concerns of veterans in his district and beyond, State Senator Bill Perkins. You will hear from both of them in a moment.

Of course we are here to talk about General Sutton and I've got a lot to say about General Sutton. I am so thrilled she's joining this administration. These are issues that, I think a lot of you know are very personal and real for me and my family. We wanted to make sure we had a leader for our Office of Veterans' Affairs, who would be a real transcendent figure in terms of serving the veterans of this city. I do want to say at the outset, a real thank you to Terrance Holliday who served this city well for the last four years as the head of this office. And served his nation well, a retired Colonel in the Air Force with over forty years of service in the Air National Guard and the Air Force Reserve. I want to thank him for all he did in his time in this role.

I want to tell you about Brigadier General Loree Sutton and why there is such great enthusiasm in my administration for her role now as our Director for Veteran's Affairs and the things that we think she will be able to do in this important post. She has an absolutely extraordinary career, nearly 30 years of military service. The time she retired the highest ranking psychiatrist in the army. She is highly decorated, including a Legion of Merit and a Bronze star.

One truly – one of the nation's leading experts on the mental health needs of our service members and our veterans. She is recognized for ground breaking work and advocacy on behalf of members of the military with traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder. She is the founding director – she was the founding director of the Military's Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and TBI. And throughout all of her work she was a dedicated member of the armed services but also a very forceful reformer.

She pioneered innovative new approaches to treatments. She established two new state of the art facilities aimed at treating PTSD, head trauma, and other invisible wounds of war. And she helped reduce the stigma associated with mental illness in the military; a stigma that we have to fight throughout our society. I know that General Sutton will help us do that on many fronts.

She's made significant differences in the lives of so many wounded warriors and their families. And she's been an outspoken advocate against sexual assault in the military. She has been a key advisor to Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, who has done such extraordinary work to pass landmark legislation overhauling military sexual assault policies.

General Sutton has done a lot for this nation, a lot for our service members and our veterans and their families. And her efforts in New York City will reach the over 200,000 veterans who live in this city. It's a crucial time for new leadership for this office because the needs are great and more complicated than ever. We have obviously growing numbers of veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, many with much more complicated challenges than past veterans faced. And they come back with the brutal scars of war and some of those scars are seen and some of them are unseen. Some of them understood and some of them are misunderstood. Too many veterans are struggling with unemployment, with homelessness, with mental health issues like Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and with traumatic brain injury. A host of challenges and we are obligated to do all we can. We – I should say at the outset – wish that the history of this nation was a little different. We wish for years, even decades, our federal government had done more for our veterans.

When my father returned from war it was a given that the federal government was going to go the extra mile for veterans. We haven't seen that in many decades, but we at the city level have to do all we can do nonetheless. It's something obviously personal to me, not just cause of what my father went through, for Chirlane's father returning from the war in Europe in World War II. The GI bill was there for him, it played a transcendent role in his life and his family's life as it did for my father and our family.

And as I think some of you heard me say before, I come from a unique family where all four of the grandparents of my children were involved in the World War II effort. My mother at the Office of War Information; my mother-in-law at the Springfield Armory, helping to create the armaments needed to protect our country. So in our family – my family and Chirlane's family – the whole notion of honoring veterans and taking care of them was something we felt very strongly.

And when I saw everything my father went through, with the problems he came back with; he lost half a leg in Okinawa, at that physical reality was with him obviously for the rest of his life. It was a daily reality for all of us. But the mental health impact was equally great, even greater. And it led him to such challenges, and you see it every day with our veterans right now, what they are experiencing and how we are not reaching enough of them.

And again first and foremost, that should be a federal role but it's all of our responsibility, it's all of our responsibility. And that's why this office is so important. We're trying to help our veterans in every way we can; employment is such an important part of the equation. By the way, employers will tell you that returning veterans bring such extraordinary capacity. We want to get that message out loud and clear. They bring so much to the work place and they are so deserving. Our veteran's affairs office is now working closely with the City Department of Small Business Services to train and help veterans to find jobs. We have specialized Workforce1 Centers in all five boroughs, where there are veteran's specialists – many of them veterans themselves – who match jobs applicants with existing jobs, provide one on one help, helping

veterans to find the right training opportunities, helping them write a resume, whatever they need to get the right start.

Since January we placed nearly 700 veterans and spouses of veterans in jobs. Remember, it's so important – and the general will tell you about this – it's so important to help the whole family. And some veterans come back are struggling, one of the best things we can do for them is make sure their spouse has a good job so the family is strong. We also have a new intern – excuse me – a new entrepreneurship program; a new entrepreneurship program helping vets start their own businesses. This was launched in January, the first class of 20 vets are working with the Department of Small Business Services. They are getting the help they need to create their own businesses and have a lasting source of income and fulfillment. A lot to do and a lot to expand on, it all requires the right leadership. And I think we know that General Sutton has proven her strength, her focus, her knowledge, her ability to get things done, her ability to challenge the status quo that wasn't working and innovate. These are the values that this administration and the values we bring particularly when it comes to serving those who have served us – our veterans who need our help. It is my honor to introduce as the new Commissioner for Veterans' Affairs for the City of New York, General Loree Sutton.

[Applause]

General Loree Sutton: Mr. Mayor, I am honored to serve in your administration. From the bottom of my heart, I thank you for your confidence and I look forward to working on behalf of all New York City veterans and their loved ones. Thank you. Let me also start out by thanking your team, it takes a team.

Mayor: It takes a village.

General Sutton: It takes a village. And from the transition team to the appointments team to the first Deputy Mayor's team and everyone here at City Hall – just a phenomenal team effort so thank you so much. Let me also start out by also expressing my gratitude to my predecessor, MOVA Commissioner Terrance Holliday for all that he has contributed during his tenure. I look forward to working together to assure a strong handoff and seamless transition. In 1981, when I donned my 'butter bars' as an Army Second Lieutenant, the notion that I would be standing before you today would have been laughably absurd. Yet, as Steve Jobs put it, "You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future." Today, looking backwards, please humor me for just a couple of minutes as I connect a few dots spanning the first 14 years of my life.

Corporal Desmond Doss, World War II Army medic and Medal of Honor Recipient, was my first introduction to Army medicine. At frequent family dinners, my cousins and I would beg "Uncle Desmond, please tell us again your story of saving dozens, dozens of soldiers under fire, and evacuating them safely down the cliffs of Okinawa." Regarding himself as the unlikeliest hero, his example of courage, humility, and service inspires me to this day.

Brigadier General Joseph F. Battley, World War Two Deputy Chief of Staff for Service Commands – close family friend, he was married to my mother's college roommate. He always impressed me with this understated manner of grace, kindness, intellect, and elegance. It was

only decades later that I discovered his role in supporting the women's Army corps. When he stated in a 1944 report, "your record-making successes prove that the army's confidence in you has not been misplaced"—reading these words invokes memories of the giants of history upon whose shoulders we stand.

Colonel Lawrence W. Whitford Jr., United States Air Force pilot, a Vietnam veteran, whose name I proudly wore on my P.O.W.M.I.A. bracelet in eighth grade. When the school principal determined that my bracelet violated the school jewelry policy, I refused to take it off as a matter of principle, integrity, and respect. Following my rapid expulsion from said school, my father, Corporal — former Corporal — Arthur E. Sutton, who had been deployed to Korea as an army journalist, he completely supported my position and forced the school to eventually reverse its ill-considered decision. This was my first lesson in speaking truth to power.

Mayor: Amen.

General Sutton: These three childhood dots shape the foundation for my life work as a physician, leader, and advocate, thus bringing my journey of trust and confidence to the present moment. Recently, on a flight into LaGuardia Airport, the flight attendant announced, "Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to New York City, the greatest city in the world." Glancing at Laurie, my life partner, our eyes met with a sparkle, reflecting our decision last year to move to Brooklyn. We now realize that there is no place on Earth that we would rather be. Thus, our hearts felt a sense of pride in embracing the world's greatest city as home. Thank you, Laurie, for everything and more.

You know, no one gets where they're going without a team. And as I look out today, I see Anu Bhagwati, who is doing such incredible work with servicewomen; I see Jennifer Rivera, starting up the vet club at Fountain House; I see Katherine La Porte, who has worked for decades on behalf of veterans, both with the United Veterans' War Council; I see Paul Rykoff, I see so many of you, I see — ha — Command Mentor Sergeant Ed Schloeman, who has taught me everything I need to know and am still learning about becoming a Brooklynite.

Mayor: Brooklynite. That's your first lesson.

General Sutton: That's my first lesson. Fuggedaboutit. How'd I do, Ed? But no one gets rid of going without a team, and I just can't thank each of you for being here today, representing the various organizations that we will partner with, and so many more going forward. When I retired from active duty in 2010, I told my team at the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury that our toughest and best work was yet ahead, and that we would meet again to prepare our communities for guiding returning veterans and their loved ones all the way home.

Making the transition from military service to life at home remains an enduring challenge. In the words of one sergeant, "Fortunately, it's not easy to shift from being a target to shopping at Target." As another veteran stated, "communities are the unit cohesion of civilian life." New York City is uniquely positioned to lead the nation in this endeavor. Much has been done. Much work remains. While many veterans are thriving, many are also struggling. Community partnerships within New York City organizations are critical to meeting the needs and harnessing the strengths of our city's veterans.

Critical allies include civic, social profit, corporate, academic, and philanthropic organizations dedicated to serving veterans. The Chambers of Commerce in all five boroughs and the VA New York Harbor Health Care System—these linkages extend beyond New York City to include the New York State division of Veterans' Affairs, as well as the U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs. The VA system cannot do it all. Together, we must work as a team. As the New York City Commissioner for Veterans' Affairs, I will directly engage with all of the boroughs, all generations of veterans, all components—active, reserve, and national Guard members, all services, veterans and their family members—as well as engaging the commitment and creativity of civic leaders, advocates, and stakeholders in all sectors.

Concurrently, I will join with my fellow commissioners and other key members of this administration to identify potential synergies, as virtually every policy issue facing New York City is relevant for veterans and their loved ones. A multi-pronged strategy is critical to the way ahead. Having led and changed complex organizations over the past three decades, I will also draw upon and broaden my network, to maximize MOVA's capacity for collaboration, stewardship, creativity, partnership and coordination. It's exciting to imagine the possibilities that lie within our grasp.

Finally, we are not alone. There is much to be gained by collaborating with other communities whose leadership is likewise committed to serving veterans and their loved ones. The New York City Commissioner for Veterans' Affairs is in the enviable position of building on New York City's current achievements to promote a robust network of strategic partnerships between individuals and organizations working to amplify both a safety net and a springboard, supporting needs and launching dreams. This collaborative venture becomes a hub of innovation that includes creative programming, arts and culture, sports and recreation, restorative health, social impact to design novel resources, healing spaces, diverse communities, digital networks, productive partnerships, and heartfelt civic pride. In short, all that makes New York City the greatest city in the world. In closing, Mr. Mayor, thank you for your leadership at this historic convergence of needs and opportunity. It will be a great honor and privilege to serve as your Commissioner of Veterans' Affairs.

Mayor: Well done, well done!

[Applause]

Mayor: Before I call up my colleagues in elected office, I just want to note the way history affects us. A few years ago, a guy named Bill White, many of you know, had been one of the great forces behind the Intrepid Museum, said to me—we were having a discussion and he said, you realize, that in your family, World War II is still going on. And then I stopped for a minute, I said, how do you mean, and he said, because everything that happened to you and your brothers, everything that happened because of your father's challenges, you're still feeling it, you're still experiencing it. That wound he suffered on Okinawa continued to affect people, and we're all grappling with the consequences. And he says that's happening every single day for veteran families all over this nation. And it was powerful to hear Loree say that one of her most important influences was a medic who served on Okinawa.

And if you ever have the occasion, I think that many people believe the definitional story, written by a front-line Marine infantryman was the story, the book, “With the Old Breed,” by E.B. Sledge, which is an incredibly moving account of just how much adversity those soldiers faced, and how they somehow survived and tried in every way they could to help each other. But, that began a story for so many families, because the wounds of every type—and obviously, even more so those who were lost—it affected families not just in 1945, but every year thereafter. And that’s why this work is so important. And you know, I’m touched further – I knew when I met Loree, that she was the real deal, and that she would do a lot of good for our veterans, but I’m touched further knowing that she and I have that common link to – tragically, one of the worst battles of all time, but it’s also a clarion call to us to do everything we can for those who suffered on behalf of us.

With that, let me call up a guy who’s been a great partner in all we do when it comes to serving our veterans and in general I always say the partnership between the mayoralty and the City Council is allowing us to get a lot done. It’s what people expect of us, they want from us. They wish they saw more of it in Washington D.C., but they get it here in New York City. We all work together to actually produce things for the people we serve and we’ve had a great friend and partner in Eric Ulrich, the chair of the Veterans' Affairs Committee.

[Applause]

Veterans Affairs Committee Chair Eric Ulrich: Thank you, thank you. Next time I'll bring my own step stool, I'm always the shortest one at all of these press conferences. Anyway, I wanted to stop by today first of all to say that I don't think Mayor de Blasio could have picked a better person to lead the Office of Veterans Affairs. General Sutton is uniquely qualified, as you heard from her resume and from her remarks, briefly, to address the many challenges and concerns that – not only the 200,000 veterans that are already in New York City are facing, but the 20 to 30 thousand that are going to come home back to New York City. What services will be in place to help them transition back into civilian life – that is perhaps going to be her greatest challenge and I give her my full support and my commitment to work very closely with her and all the members of the administration to make sure that we're doing right by our veterans.

Veterans is a non-partisan issue. There is no Democrat or Republican way of helping our veterans and their families. There's a right way and a wrong way. And so far as I can tell, everything that this administration has done up unto this point today and moving forward is going to be doing right by our veterans and I am going to partner and work very closely with them. So I congratulate General Sutton, I'm going to work with her, work with the administration and make sure that we help our veterans and their families get the help and services that they need and quite frankly that they've earned they deserve. Thank you very much. Thank you.

[Applause]

Mayor: Another great partner and a long standing friend serves us in Albany, a place where it's sometimes hard to get things to happen but he perseveres and he particularly puts a lot of focus on veterans, again, of his district and beyond, State Senator Bill Perkins.

[Applause]

State Senator Bill Perkins: Thank you Mr. Mayor and to Commissioner Sutton, I want to welcome you to this extraordinary time in our city when we have this outstanding mayor with a great vision, especially for our veterans, but for all New Yorkers. I have had the privilege of serving with him and I know well his commitment to this city and to the kind of work that I'm sure you two will partner together and be rather historic. I am very privileged. I represent the 30th senatorial district, which includes Harlem, the Upper West Side and Lower East Side Heights, and I have with me some veterans by the way, as well as my Chief of Staff Cordell Cleare and I want to ask those veterans who have joined me to please stand up because they are here to welcome you as well – Tanya Douglas from Legal Services NYC; Joe Bello, NYC Metro Vets, and LaGuardia College Veterans Project; as well as Mario Moreno of Samaritan Village, are they still with us? Please stand up.

[Applause]

State Senator Perkins: They are not only here because of the importance of your appointment, but even more so because on their behalf I want to extend you your first – I hope – invitation to a veterans event. And so this is the flyer that announces it. It is a veterans resource fair in Harlem on Wednesday, August 20th from 9 to 2 at the Adam Clayton Powell Jr. State Office Building and amongst some of our special guests, hopefully will include you as well as our veteran honorable Congressman Charles B. Rangel of the United States House of Representatives, Chief Master Sergeant of the U.S. Air Force, Dina Michael, Commissioner Terrance Holliday of the Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs, as well as some participating agencies that focus their time and attention on veterans affairs, including the Legal Services of NYC, New York City's Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs, Harlem's Veterans Center, The Institute for Family Health Military Women in Power, Samaritan village, United States Department of Veterans Affairs, and the NAACP Veterans Committee. So we hope that you will be able to join us. I know that, hopefully we're the first invitation you've received and therefore at the front of the line, but of course we know that this is New York City and –

Mayor: You have to register as a lobbyist now. [laughs]

State Senator Perkins: I am very honored to be the state senator representative of Harlem, even though it's less pay, but I appreciate your thought. But in any case, in all seriousness it would really do us a great honor to have you come to this event and to join us introducing you to our community of veterans, not only from our neighborhood but also from the city at large. Thank you so much. And Mr. Mayor, thank you for your vision and your leadership, you have not yet disappointed me and my colleagues and so continue the good work.

Mayor: I'm going to keep at that. I'm going to keep at that. Thank you.

[Applause]

Mayor: I'm going to do a brief, brief word in Español and then we'll do on topic and then we will do off topic.

[Mayor speaks Spanish]

Mayor: With that, we welcome first on topic questions. On topic, on topic.

Question: There was discussion at a city council hearing a couple months ago about pulling the Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs, making it its own agency, making it a bigger budget. Is that something you are thinking about doing? Is that anything that you've thought about, talked about with the new commissioner?

Mayor: Well we think that the model we have now is an important and effective one and we can do a lot more with. It's certainly something we would entertain going forward, but I think the way I look at this is we wanted to bring in a new leader, get going with the model we have now, and then we'll judge from there. On topic, yes?

Question: [inaudible]

Mayor: Oh it's you Vince, I'm sorry. It's like who's this new handsome member of the media? We're supposed to do media only at this point, but we'll get you on the rebound, thank you.

Question: Can you just tell us what you think the biggest problem is for veterans as you take on this job?

Mayor: Well, I think it's the combination of mental health challenges, I'll obviously let the General speak, but you know, what strikes me as a layman, it is the range and variety of mental health challenges in a country that still has not come to grips with the need to provide better mental health services across the board for everyone, but especially for veterans who have such profound needs. So I think that's the biggest set of challenges we're facing. There's obviously the employment challenges, homelessness, a host of issues that we're focused on, but that was part of what was so appealing about General Sutton and the idea of naming her this role, was that her expertise in terms of addressing these mental health issues is second to none and this is the great challenge we face.

General Sutton: Certainly I would agree with all that the mayor has said. I would also say that you know when any of us who have served in uniform, of whatever generation, when we are in uniform, working with a team, with our buddies, dedicated to the mission – we know that we belong. And when we remove that uniform and come back to life at home, I think the biggest challenge is in finishing the last half of that journey, which is to acknowledge that once I am a warrior, a veteran, I am always a warrior and a veteran, and so now my challenge becomes that of engaging with my home community and forging an honorable identity that leverages my commitment to service so that I will continue to have a mission, I will continue to live by a code of values, of honor, that says I will do whatever it takes to speak out on behalf of those who have no voice, those who have no home, those who have no job, and together we will move forward and be stronger.

[Applause]

Question: I'd like to ask the general what her assessment is of the care that veterans get at V.A. hospitals in New York, and whether you see that as part of your job, to monitor the care they're getting in these hospitals?

General Sutton: Thank you so much for that question – a question about veterans care and my role in terms of whether I would monitor that. I would say that I've had the privilege over these last several months, of working in two capacities. One, as a member of the New York City Veterans Mental Health Coalition, led by Scott Thompson under the auspices of the Mental Health of America. And this is over a thousand service providers, including leaders from the VA system, the vet centers as well as our local community providers – who are working together to make sure that we're providing the services – improving the services. So I think that whether it be working with the mental health coalition, whether it be working with Paul Rykoff and the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, whether it be working with Vince and Pat, at the United War Veterans Council or over here to Anu and her group or Jennifer and Catherine or Eva Usadi. There are so many organizations that are here in New York City. We are ideally placed to keep the communication flowing because I can assure you, no one in the VA system comes to work in the morning saying, we're going to shortchange our veterans. And so if we can keep the community communication flowing, both from the top-down, grassroots-up, middle-out, including families. Together, we will be able to raise that standard for all veterans, all family members in our city.

Question: And the care that they are getting now?

General Sutton: My assessment of the care that they are getting now – I will take that on as a challenge as I conduct my 90 day assessment – the first 90 days of my tenure starting on the second of September. So I'll get back to you in November.

Mayor: I want to just add on a personal note; you know, again, there are so many families that have had a loved one in VA care. My father was in VA hospitals for quite a while recovering from his wounds. The information that came out in the last few months of some hospitals not providing timely care was deeply disturbing. And I just want to say that is not a value judgment on all VA institutions or the people who serve. I agree with the general, I think the vast majority of people who serve those institutions do it with a real sense of commitment. But I think what was troubling to me and a lot of Americans was the notion of not admitting that people weren't getting help – trying to cover up that people weren't getting help. That's not acceptable in government in any way, shape or form. It is particularly unfair and disturbing when it comes to our veterans. And so I'm glad it came to light, even though it indicated some people have really suffered. I'm glad it came to light because it was a clarion call to get it right at all levels of government. You can't not serve someone who served this country. On topic? On topic. Going once. Going twice. Dave you can't go before the going twice Dave, unless you want to go on topic [laughter].

General Sutton: Can I just say one other thing?

Mayor: Of course. See what you get Dave? Please Loree, keep talking on topic.

[Laughter]

General Sutton: One other thing. Is that when Laurie and I first moved to New York City last year, one of the first things that I did was to go to the Brooklyn VA. I am registered for health care in the VA so I'll be able to tell you firsthand. So far, my care has been excellent.

Mayor: On topic going once, going twice. Going thrice. Dave.

Question: Mr. Mayor let me ask you first of all, your reaction to the news this weekend from the Council speaker. And whether your hope is, but making this public, that it will lead to perhaps women – especially young women – getting vaccinated.

Mayor: Before this weekend, I had great respect for Melissa Mark-Viverito. My respect is even greater today. She did something very brave. She is facing a personal crisis. She could've kept it to herself, no one would've blamed her but she decided to use it as a teachable moment to encourage women to get the screening they need. I think it was brave, I think it was exemplary, I think it's a classic example of who Melissa is as a person – that she thought about the needs of other first. And it's a powerful moment. But when I spoke to her earlier today, I said, look, we all really deeply respect what you're doing as a public servant, but we all need to be there for you as an individual and a friend too. And so I think it's really important that everyone respect that she has some important work to do now to make sure that she's healthy.

Question: Mr. Mayor, according to the NYPD, 23 people were shot this weekend – which not only is way above a typical summer weekend – but shootings are up 12 percent or more so far this year. What are you planning to do about it? Have you spoken to the police commissioner today about it?

Mayor: Let me tell you the plan, because it's consistent with what we have done up to now. I don't take any additional shootings lightly – I don't take any additional crime of any kind lightly – we are going to address it aggressively in each and every case. The overall facts bear repeating however, crime overall in the city is down over three percent compared to last year. As of last night at midnight, we were down 26 murders compared to last year. We are doing that consistently by applying officers into the areas of greatest need and to the precincts with the greatest challenges – into some of the NYCHA developments with the greatest challenges. And by and large, that effort has been bearing fruit. Now whenever we see any uptick in shootings, we apply additional resources quickly.

I'll give Commissioner Bratton tremendous credit. He is the guy of course who brought us the Comp stat system. The whole notion is to quickly and agilely make moves and adjustments and that is being done as we speak to stay ahead of the problem. Again, even one additional shooting is one too many. That being said, at the end of midnight last night, we had 68 more shootings this year than we had at this time last year. So putting it in perspective, we are still in – compared to recent years– this is going to be one of the lowest years ever for shootings if we continue on this pace. And that is important to recognize, but we will continue to add officers and add other approaches to any place we see the challenge tick up. Marcia?

Question: Mr. Mayor, I wonder – considering the police [inaudible] – are your thoughts on how the administration will be policing the rally in Staten Island on Saturday, you know given what's going on in the country. You know obviously there will be some sensitivity and maybe some passionate feelings. How would you police that rally, what are your plans?

Mayor: I think the communication between the NYPD and the march organizers has been exceptional. It's been constant, it's been collegial. Obviously now the march will take place only on Staten Island, for a fairly limited area. It is part of a tradition in New York City, where the

vast majority of the time, there is real respect – mutual respect– between protestors and police. Where there is a lot of coordination and a lot of communication in this city, we value the right of people to make their feelings heard. And the NYPD does an extraordinary job of creating a smart, flexible approach that accommodates the right to free speech and respects people’s rights. But also keeps safety in order. So I think there’s been a lot of really exceptionally good preparation for this upcoming march. And I think it will go very smoothly.

Question: [Inaudible]

Mayor: Sure. Yeah I think the message is that we all want to work together to improve the relationship between police and community. There are real reforms and changes on the way. Because we know that the best way to be safe and secure is to bring police and community together. We know that there have been instances of excessive force and they’re not something that we accept and we want to fix. And there are ways of fixing them and we will fix them, including the retraining of the entire police force. So, reform is moving forward, the city remains safe and we are going to work to make it safer. But the way to express the desire for change is through peaceful means. By the way, if you want a great example of all the above – the silent march on fifth avenue a couple years ago that was a decisive moment in crystallizing support for change in the Stop and Frisk policy. It was absolutely peaceful demonstration that got its message out and there was absolute coordination between the police and the protestors. That’s a model of how we do things in New York City.

Question: Mr. Mayor, do you support a [inaudible]

Mayor: Thank you, Senator Perkins points out many of the same people who organized the silent march a couple years back that went so well are the same people who are organizing this march coming up.

Question: Do you support a bill the Council plans to vote on this week that would increase reporting requirements for the Department of Corrections at Rikers Island and specifically on solitary confinement conditions.

Mayor: I don’t know all of the details of the bill, but I can say that we want transparency around Rikers Island and the Department of Corrections. I will repeat – because it bears repeating – we are not satisfied in this administration with the state of things on Rikers Island. Our new Commissioner, Joe Ponte, is doing an extraordinary job bringing about the reforms we need. You will never hear us say we are content with the situation there until a lot of change has happened, which is why we’re investing a lot of resources. As I talked about earlier with veterans, and I’ll talk about with our inmates as well – the biggest challenge is mental health and the lack of appropriate mental health services. We’re trying very rapidly to improve the mental health services there. So, I want a lot of transparency around it, but I don’t know the specifics of the bill. We can get back to you on that.

Question: Mr. Mayor, just going back to the speaker’s – her decision to reveal her diagnosis on twitter. Just wondering if you could react to the fact that she made the decision to make it public using social media. What does that say?

Mayor: It's absolutely authentically her. As everyone knows, she's a big user of social media. And I think it speaks to her desire to go right to the people with the message and say that she is using her own life as an example to people to inspire them to take care of themselves and their loved ones and get the screening they need. You know, we've seen this in other situations, where people who happen to be well-known help to de-mystify a challenge that they've faced. It's a very very important thing that people in public life do. It's not always comfortable, but it's necessary. So I give her a lot of credit for speaking out so clearly.

Question: Just looking at the bus routes that have been given out to school bus companies that have contracts with the city. One, what are taxpayers getting in return? It's a \$42 million investment. And two, of all the private employees that do work with the city, why is it that bus workers are getting the extra –

Mayor: Well think about what they do, and I speak as a parent as well as mayor here. These bus drivers and matrons take care of our children – and in many cases our special-ed kids, who have real challenges. You know my children used to ride the school bus, and every parent knows that feeling, you give your child over to a school bus driver and a matron. And you need experienced folks who know what they're doing and preferably who know the children, the community, know the routes well. And so, that action is taken to make sure we have experienced veteran drivers and matrons who know how to keep our kids safe. That's what we're getting back for.

Question: I was wondering what your thoughts are on some calls on recent days from members of Congress for a federal prosecutor to take over the investigation into Eric Garner's death. What do you think of the job the local district attorney, Dan Donovan, has been doing. And whether you know him, whether you've been talking with him throughout this administration about you know, his history –

Mayor: I personally have not spoken with the district attorney. I know him a bit, I respect him. From everything I can see, he is taking it very seriously and doing his job. What we've said repeatedly is, if the federal government makes the decision to become involved, we will cooperate with them. But right now, this is in the hands of the district attorney and I think he is obviously a capable person and he's taking it seriously. Wait let me do a few more.

Question: Mr. Mayor, the Wall Street Journal is reporting that Michael Brown's family will travel to Staten Island for the rally. Do you know, if anything, what role they play, or if there will be additional security provided?

Mayor: I don't know any of the specifics of that. I will say there will be a lot of security provided for this march. And again, it's something I've talked to our police leadership about repeatedly. There's been extraordinary communication and cooperation between the march leaders and the police.

Question: Mayor de Blasio, can you talk about your decision not to reimburse for personal trips? And you know, other politicians do it, why did you decide not?

Mayor: We follow the Conflict of Interest Board guidelines – the Conflict of Interest Board is the definitive voice in terms of ethics in this city. I've been following their guidelines to the letter, as previous mayors have, and I think that's the right way to approach it.

Question: I was just going to ask the same question. A number of elected officials as you know have decided to reimburse, especially for trips outside the city. Why do you think that's not right for you?

Mayor: Well, again, the Conflict of Interest Board sets the pace. And the fact is – when it comes to for example – when I went on my recent trip to Italy. I believe you were there. I thought I saw a guy who looked just like you in a hotel in Naples. [laughter] I want to give Michael Saul credit, it was after midnight – I was hanging out in the hotel lobby. He tried to eavesdrop on the conversation, I was very impressed by his intrepid – sure you did [laughter]. It's interesting he said hello while holding the microphone forward. But as you know on that trip, my family and I paid for our plane tickets, we paid for our hotel. We again followed the Conflict of Interest Board rules and NYPD rules when it comes to all other matters. Thank you – again that's based on Conflict of Interest rules and NYPD rules. Thanks so much.

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