



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

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**CONTACT:** [pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov](mailto:pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov), (212) 788-2958

**RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO DELIVERS REMARKS AT NYPD MEDAL DAY CEREMONY**

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Thank you so much, Lieutenant Giorgio. It is truly an honor to be at Medal Day. This is part of the great tradition of this department – a tradition stretching all the way back to 1845 – a proud and consistent tradition. And the history is filled with so many stories – stories we know and stories we never got to hear, but equally powerful – of sacrifice, of courage, of professionalism. And Medal Day is a moment to recognize just how extraordinary the men and women of this department are.

Before I go on, I just want to thank the leadership of the NYPD – Commissioner Bratton and Chief of Department O’Neill for their extraordinary work every single day, protecting the people of this city. Let us thank them for all they do. You can applaud.

[Applause]

We thank all the leadership here on the [inaudible] and I want to particularly single out those who provide the spiritual guidance and solace to the men and women who do this work – our chief chaplain, Rabbi Kass, and our deputy chief chaplain, Monsignor Romano. Their work is truly selfless. Let’s thank them and all the chaplains.

[Applause]

And finally, let’s thank those who represent the men and women of this force through their work as labor leaders. Pat Lynch, Mike Palladino, Lou Turco, and Roy Richter, who are all here with us today – thank them for their good work.

[Applause]

You know, I think it’s important that we recognize on Medal Day, of course we are talking about the stories of people who did exceptional things – real acts of courage and sacrifice, extraordinary professionalism, cool under fire. I’m going to mention a couple of them in a moment, but every single one of the men and women here has an incredible story.

But Medal Day should be also a moment to reflect upon the work that all the men and women of the NYPD do, and why they do it, because that goes under-recognized frequently. There’s always a raging public debate, and a lot of times that misses the underlying truth that people join this department for a reason. People join the NYPD because they believe – they believe in making people’s lives better. They want to help their fellow New Yorkers. They want to keep people safe. They are shepherds, and they understand how important it is to protect their flock.

I’ve been inspired by so many of the stories that Commissioner Bratton has told, including the story of how he first was inspired to seek a career in police work by a book he took out of his local library. And something captured his imagination. And even as a young boy he knew he wanted to help others and there was only one way that truly called to him to do it.

And I suspect a lot of the men and women sitting here before us could tell you their story. Maybe it was a family member, maybe it was a moment in history, maybe it was a book, maybe it was a movie. But something called them to what is clearly a higher calling. It's not what the typical person chooses to do. It takes guts, it takes determination, it takes a fundamental belief that you actually can help your fellow human being, regardless of what adversity is thrown at you.

There'll be plenty of time to debate different questions of policy, but today we should actually remember the underlying motivation – people choose this profession because they want to make a difference. And those before us made a difference on a grand scale. Those before us are examples to everyone else of just how meaningful that choice can be.

I want to tell you a few of the stories. Officer Rosa Rodriguez is here with us today and she will be receiving the Medal of Honor, the highest award.

Last spring, she responded to a fire in a NYCHA building in Coney Island with her partner, Officer Dennis Guerra. They were the first on the scene, and this epitomizes the point I'm making. They were the first on the scene and people were in danger. There was no other presence. FDNY hadn't gotten there yet. There wasn't backup available yet. They did not hesitate, however, to go towards the danger because they knew people were in danger right that moment. Time was not on their side, and they rushed into the fire to help. They were overcome by the heavy smoke. Thank God Officer Rodriguez survived, and we thank her for her extraordinary bravery. Let's give her a round of applause right now.

[Applause]

And we lost a very good man. We lost Officer Guerra. Commissioner Bratton and I spent time with his family – a family, like so many that had a long tradition of serving this city. We lost a good man, but he did what he believed in to serve others and he, today as well, will be posthumously awarded a Medal of Honor. Let's salute, through our applause, the life of Officer Guerra.

[Applause]

And also receiving Medals of Honor today, posthumously – Detective Wenjian Liu and Detective Rafael Ramos, whose stories have literally touched a part of every New Yorker, and have made us feel both a deep sorrow, but also a deep pride in these two individuals who epitomize the American dream – the dream of New York – who did what they believed in in serving others in so many ways. Two individuals who served others, not just when their on the job, but in every facet of their life. And they inspire us. And their loss saddens us deeply. But today, we honor them and let us give both the families, who are here today, a round of applause to thank them for all they have done.

[Applause]

Today, we also honor 14 individuals who served at Ground Zero. And I don't have to recount for you the details because we all know them well. Talk about selflessness – searching tirelessly for survivors, participating in the rescue and recovery efforts. Everyone knew it was dangerous, but they believed, they believed it was their obligation to be there for those who were their comrades in arms.

There are some here before us, whose stories are so extraordinary, I suspect we'll remember them for many years to come. And I suspect they will inspire us to realize what a dedicated human being can do in the face of adversity. One is Detective Nelson Vergara. He will be receiving the Combat Cross. A veteran of the U.S. Marines – and as I tell you this story, it will not surprise you that he is a Marine. He finished a long tour of duty that day as an NYPD officer. He was on his way home. He was just blocks away from his house, probably assuming that he was about to enter the safe confines of his own home, and suddenly he found himself in the middle of a violent incident. Gunshots rang out. He was shot in the leg. Now, Officer Vergara – down – you

could have said that was the end of the story, and he would no longer be a participant in to what would unfold. But that was not the way Officer Vergara saw the situation. There was a victim of a different shooting on the scene – of another bullet –lying in the street. And the shooter walked over and stood above the other victim and leveled his gun. Officer Vergara, already shot once, threw himself again into harm's way, distracted the shooter, saved the victim's life, engaged in the exchange of fire, and was hit again. The gunman, at that point, fled. And Officer Vergara chased and was able to get crucial information that led to the arrest of the shooter. Now, take that in for a moment – hit once, hit again, and still performing his duty in an exemplary manner. Let's thank now, Detective Nelson Vergara, for all he has done.

[Applause]

And again there are so many extraordinary stories. I'm just offering you a few to exemplify the great individuals here before us – Detective Jamie Arroyo, Retired Sergeant Felix Clark – both receiving the Combat Cross. Sergeant Clark and then-Officer Arroyo were patrolling in the 7-3 Precinct. They saw three men in a large crowd firing their guns in the air. They ordered them to drop their weapons. The men disobeyed. Instead, they turned their weapons on the officers and fired. Officer Arroyo and Sergeant Clark showed incredible calm and restraint – restraint and good judgment. Bullets flying at them, but what did they think about? They thought about the crowd all around them and the danger that an innocent bystander would be shot and harmed. And so, only when they were certain they wouldn't harm bystanders did they return fire. They chased the shooters into a building. Two more shooters appeared. The officers got backup and were able to apprehend the shooters. This extraordinary story is a testament to the NYPD's devotion to protecting the innocent, no matter what the danger. Let us thank Officer Arroyo and Sergeant Clark for their extraordinary efforts.

[Applause]

– now-Detective Arroyo. I'll conclude with this. And I think it really speaks to the mission, and the deep sense of mission felt by the men and women of this department. Charles Dickens, one of the great observers of human life, he wrote, "There is a man who would give his life to keep a life you love beside you." Well that, my friends, is what the men and women of the NYPD decided to do the day they took the oath. We honor them for it. And we honor these great examples, these men and women before us, who remind us of just what heights human beings can reach in defense of their fellow men and women. We thank them all. And we thank all members of the NYPD for their service. Thank you and God bless you.

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