

de Blasio Proves Tone Deaf in Veterans Advisory Board Appointments

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IAVA representation removed from committee

NEW YORK (April 9, 2015) – The following statement is from Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) CEO and Founder Paul Rieckhoff in response to today's announcement by New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio of his appointments for the Veteran Advisory Board (VAB) for the city:

"These appointments, already long over due, are a visible representation of the tone deafness of this administration on veteran issues. Most glaring is the lack of Veteran Service Organizations and veteran service providers represented on the list. It's hard to believe this administration could be further disconnected from the veterans' community, but these appointments achieve exactly that.

The mayor made big promises about veterans' services in New York City but, so far, has not delivered despite being provided ample time and opportunity. For example, it took him nearly nine months to appoint a Commissioner of Veterans Affairs. Even now, after Commissioner Dr. Loree Sutton's nearly eight months on the job, we still don't have a public comprehensive plan for the direction of Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs (MOVA) or veteran services in the city.

IAVA is a national veterans empowerment organization headquartered in New York with more than 10 years of experience in delivering results for veterans. Yet, when we've tried to provide advice and guidance to this administration, we've repeatedly been rebuffed. IAVA and other VSOs have been highly critical of the mayor in numerous testimonies ranging from MOVA to the VAB. With little VSO representation on the VAB, we hope this isn't a sign of what happens when you question this mayor.

While the appointment of a committee won't provide a sure fix, it should be part of a real plan, real leadership and real resources. The mayor still has not met once with the existing VAB, or a single time with IAVA or other leading veterans organizations. We know he's busy, but if the president of the United States can find time to meet with us three times over the last few months, we'd hope the mayor could squeeze us into his schedule.

Since being elected, the mayor has consistently fought expansion of MOVA – including expanding its budget and creating a Department of Veterans Affairs, which would bring greater services to NYC veterans and has overwhelming support in city council. In total the MOVA budget, after this year's budget is passed, will only be roughly \$500,000 for a city that has an estimated 230,000 veterans. The mayor was also largely responsible for a gubernatorial

veto of a veterans pension bill that was passed nearly unanimously in the state legislature.

With 6,844 U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs disability claims pending and 3,380 stuck in the New York Regional Office backlog, our veterans need help, not excuses, from their local leaders. Further, city veterans wait an average of 225 days to complete a claim, significantly higher than the national average of 184 days. A viable VAB is exactly what our veterans need. These latest appointments to the VAB are just another example of the mayor's laissez-faire attitude towards veterans' issues in NYC. The community deserves and demands better from its city.

We have more post-9/11 members than any organization in America. And more than anyone in NYC. Anyone who works in this space or attends the Veterans Day parade knows that. The lack of a representation of any kind from IAVA is a slap in the face to thousands of our members city wide."