

VETERANS & SENIORS COMMITTEE

of the

SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE

VERBATIM TRANSCRIPT

A regular meeting of the Veterans and Seniors Committee of the Suffolk County Legislature was held in the Rose Y. Caracappa Auditorium of the William H. Rogers Legislative Building, 725 Veterans Memorial Highway, Smithtown, New York on February 29, 2012.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Legislator Steve Stern - Chairman
Legislator Sarah Anker - Vice Chair
Legislator Tom Barraga
Legislator DuWayne Gregory
Legislator Ricardo Montano

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

George Nolan - Counsel to the Legislature
Legislator Edward Romaine - 1st Legislative District
Renee Ortiz - Chief Deputy Clerk - Suffolk County Legislature
Tom Ronayne - Director of Veterans Services
Holly Rhodes-Teague - Office of the Aging
Paule Pachter - Long Island Cares
Jessica Rosati - Long Island Cares
John Narciso - NYS Veteran's Business Outreach Center
Bob Martinez - Aide to Legislator Montano
Bill Shilling - Aide to Legislator Anker
Deborah Harris - Aide to Legislator Stern
Ben Zwirn - County Executive's Office
Richard Meyer - AME
All other interested parties

VERBATIM MINUTES TAKEN BY:

Donna Catalano - Court Stenographer

(*THE MEETING WAS CALLED TO ORDER AT 1:00 P.M.*)

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Welcome, everybody, to the Committee on Veterans and Seniors. I ask everyone to please rise and join for the Pledge led by Legislator Barraga.

SALUTATION

Please remain standing and join in a moment of silence as we keep all of our great men and women fighting for our freedoms around the world in our thoughts and prayers. Thank you.

MOMENT OF SILENCE

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Thank you. Welcome, everybody. We are going to start out of with public portion this afternoon. Paule, come on up. I have one card. If anyone else would like to speak as part of public portion, we need you to fill out a card and hand it forward. Paule, welcome, you have three minutes.

MR. PACHTER:

Good afternoon. I'm Paule Pachter, the Executive Director of Long Island Cares and the Harry Chapin Food Bank. As most of you know, our organization was established in 1980 by the late singer/songwriter and social activist Harry Chapin as Long Island's very first food bank. Well, 32 years later, our organization provides emergency food to 560 community-based programs and directly serves nearly 20,000 Long Islanders through our 14 direct-service programs, including our two triage pantries, our mobile outreach units, our storefront Hunger Assistance Center in Freeport and our mobile pantry for our seniors, veterans and medically challenged populations.

I appreciate the opportunity to address the committee on the critical issue of senior nutrition services, and in particular, our concerns relative to the impending closing of the central kitchen at Brookhaven National Laboratory that's currently operated by the American Red Cross. I'm aware that the administration of the American Red Cross has made a decision to focus their resources towards responding to natural disasters and emergency response. Therefore, their involvement in providing meals to our seniors in need through seven local feeding programs and the oversight of the central kitchen will now become the responsibility of other sources if feasible.

Long Island Cares is recognized by both the New York State Department of Health and the USDA as the regional food bank for Long Island. We administer the Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program for DOH and the Emergency Food Assistance Program for the USDA. It's our understanding that the central kitchen as operated by the Red Cross will cease operations at the end of April, leaving at least five local senior programs to negotiate contracts with private vendors for the provision of food for our seniors participating in feeding programs in Mastic, Center Moriches, Shoreham, Mount Sinai and Gordon Heights.

It would be more cost efficient and beneficial for the central kitchen to remain operational under the leadership of an organization with the experience of providing food and meals to our seniors in need. It makes sense to continue to centralize the provision of meals to senior citizens through an organization that has both a proven track record of working with food manufacturers, distributors as well as the USDA.

There may be many organizations on Long Island that have similar experiences to ours in providing food to help sustain our seniors. Long Island Cares had previously expressed an interest in operating the central kitchen at BNL if the withdrawal of the American Red Cross became imminent. It's our understanding that the County is not going to place the administration of the central kitchen out to public bid through an RFP process. I'm here this afternoon to ask this committee to advocate

to implement an RFP for the administration of the central kitchen and that organizations with the experience and desire to provide emergency food and community support services for our senior citizens be invited to submit proposals. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Thank you and thanks for being with us today. I know that Holly is here, and Holly will be speaking with us about this issue in much greater depth as we move on this afternoon, so I don't want to get too deeply into the process and our current status and what we're going to be doing going forward.

But I do have a question specific to Long Island Cares, the organization. Based on your understanding of the centralized model, which we may or may not be following going forward, can you maybe share with us a little bit about Long Island Cares and why you think that your organization would be willing and able to provide those services? What's the same based on your mission and the kinds of things that you do now and perhaps the kinds of things that are different if you were to provide those kinds of services at the centralized location?

MR. PACHTER:

I think right now -- first of all, we provide food to senior citizens throughout both Nassau and Suffolk County. As the regional food bank, we purchase about 80% of the food that we distribute to the 560 agencies on Long Island. So if you are operating the central kitchen and you're purchasing food to feed hundreds or thousands of senior citizens, it makes sense to buy it through one -- you know, through a series of vendors that you have experience with as opposed to taking five organizations, small local community organizations, and go say, "Negotiate contracts."

You know, one of the things that I believe we excel in, and I think the Department of Social Services here in Suffolk County will attest, is the fact that we provide all of the food to the nine DSS locations throughout the communities. DSS couldn't go ahead and say to each of the nine sites, you know, "Go buy your own food." We're able to purchase -- we have buying power, we certainly get the best prices because of the volume that we buy, and we have the expertise at providing nutritious meals to people in need. We also have a very good relationship with the Brookhaven National Lab.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Legislator Romaine.

LEG. ROMAINE:

Thank you, by the way, for contacting my office earlier this week. As you know, maybe my colleagues don't know, Brookhaven Lab provides the kitchen to Red Cross at no charge as they would do for Long Island Cares. The kitchen operates to serve seven nutrition centers throughout Brookhaven Town. That center has always run not at a profit, but they certainly haven't needed extra money, in fact, sometimes they've returned money to the budget because it's an economy-of-scale operation.

The American Red Cross made a decision last year in which they notified the County, "We're getting out of this business, we're going to stay with disaster relief. We're not going to get into nutrition." As a result, the County went out to bid at the end of June last year, and opened a bid, and there was only one bidder. For whatever reason, the County found that bidder not qualified and then told the various nutrition centers that they would have to go out and contract with providers to provide the meals -- cook the meals and provide it for them.

So for example, Moriches Nutrition Center was told to go to Hampton Bays to get their meals. I think a centralized kitchen, particularly one that we're not being charged for by the lab, we'll get an economy-of-scale in which we'll get a better bang for the buck, and we'll be able to serve the seven nutrition centers in Brookhaven Town. And I agree with Long Island Cares that we should reopen this RFP at this point, because I do believe -- and not to state anything ahead of the fact, but I do believe that Long Island Cares is a legitimate, well-respected, long-term, not-for-profit in providing

meals and that they could be, could be, a provider that would have to -- but we need to reopen that RFP so that we can get a vendor in there rather than telling all of the seven programs, "You're on your own. And we will help you, but each one has to get different providers." I think a centralized kitchen, particularly at no cost to us, where a reputable organizations such as Long Island Cares would be a way to go to keep this kitchen still operating.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Anyone else? Paule, thank you. As I said, we'll be speaking with Holly in just a moment.

Would anybody else like to address the County? I don't have any other cards. Seeing none, let's start off then with Director Ronayne, then, Holly, we will have you come up.

MR. RONAYNE:

Good afternoon, Chairman Stern, members. As always, thank you again for the invitation and the opportunity to appear before you. I have a couple of items that I would like to share with you, then as always, I'm happy to take any questions.

Firstly, I would like to make you all aware that recently, two weeks ago, myself and two members of my staff, two other veterans service officers, attended our mandatory Veteran Service Officer Continuing Education, which is a requirement for us to maintain our accreditations, which is granted by the Department of Veterans Affairs allowing us to represent veterans in the pursuit of their claims before the Department of Veterans Affairs.

This training is always interesting. This year it was particularly interesting and I think very beneficial in that there were a couple of recent decisions by the Board of Veterans Appeals and the Court of Appeals for Veterans that were by all accounts precedent setting with regard to how VA going forward is going to have to view certain submissions on behalf of veterans relative to Vietnam Service. One of them in particular was related to -- and I'm sure General Barraga and Legislator Gregory will agree with this, there has been a long standing disagreement within the veteran community and the Veteran Benefit Administration as to the status of Navy veterans in Vietnam and whether what we refer to as blue water or brown water. Brown water meaning that they served within the territorial waters, rivers and so forth. And there have been tremendous differences in the administration of benefits that these two populations have been eligible for.

These new cases seem to -- and the courts have recently held that the door has now been opened for these benefits to be extended to the blue water Navy veterans, who the majority of us feel have been wrongly set away from the ability to obtain these benefits. So we've already begun culling our files and looking for cases that we have here in Suffolk County where veterans have been impacted by past rulings that we should now be able to go back and reopen those cases and hopefully prosecute successfully on their behalf for benefits that they have previously been denied.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Any idea how many cases that might entail?

MR. RONAYNE:

I wouldn't even hazard a guess at this point. We know that there are probably in the order of a couple of hundred. I wouldn't try to get a real fine point on that number though, because we're just now in the early stages of beginning to cull through the folders and the files and making that determination.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Is that going to be a determination that you make in reviewing the files? Is that something that we -- that your office is going to do proactively, or is it going to wait for veterans to get that information and then contact you?

MR. RONAYNE:

No, we are going to proactively go into the folders, we're going to review all of the files -- I say folders, they are computerized -- because these veterans who, in the past, have been denied for instances specific to these decisions, many of them are aging. And we don't necessarily have the benefit of waiting for them to come back to us. We will identify their cases to the best of our ability, seek them out, barring being able to contact the veterans, if we should have lost any of them, we will follow this up with their widows or their next of kin.

Again, there were a number of issues that came out of the training. This was a particularly successful training in terms of information that came out of it that I think will benefit local veterans. And we're happy that we had the opportunity to take part in it. There have been a number of other events taking place. There have been some ceremonial -- we had a dinner yesterday for an American Legion past County commander. There was -- again, various ceremonial issues, one that I would like to make mention, I know Legislator Stern is well acquainted with the American Legion in Greenlawn Post 1244. I was informed yesterday that their candidate for the Annual American Legion Oratory Contest has been successfully -- has been selected at the State level. She won the State level championship, and is now going on to Indianapolis to compete against the other 49 states for the national championship. So that certainly is worthy of mention. That would be Kaitlyn Kennedy from St. Pius School in Melville.

One of the other more important things that we've been working on as of late, and again, Legislator Stern has been part of this as has Legislator Cilmi, is we have revisited the legislation relative to the solicitation or raising of funds on behalf of veterans by various non-for-profit organizations. Some of them are very credible and we're very happy and proud to have them with us in Suffolk County and working with us doing their fine work. Some of them, no so much.

We have identified a couple of areas where we think we'll be able to enhance this legislation, and we have increased the level of awareness through my office of just what our rights and responsibilities under that existing legislation are. So going forward, we are hoping that we'll be able to do a more effective job of -- I hesitate to use the word policing -- but to ensure that the folks out there raising money in the name of veterans are doing what they represent that they are doing. You know, it's great that we do this sort of thing. You know, we get a lot of accolades and a lot of thank you's, and certainly the Legislators who participate do as well, but I want to single out Sarah Simpson from Counsel's office. She has really -- no disrespect, Legislator, she's the brains behind this whole thing. She is the one who is spending the hours doing the research and writing the papers and just really walking us through this process. So, Sarah, thank you for all that you have been doing on this. I know that's it's taking up no small amount of your time.

APPLAUSE

We recently had an opportunity, I was able to be in Albany last week, and I was able to have the opportunity to testify briefly before the Senate Mental Health Committee relative to Post Traumatic Stress, which is an important issue. It's something that we work with on a daily basis. We've got a great many veterans, and by extension, their families and their loved ones, those who are surrounding these veterans. The hearing I think was successful.

Unfortunately, I think this is an awareness -- I think everybody has heard of Post Traumatic Stress, understands to some extent what it is. As with so many other things, unfortunately, we are limited in what we are able to do in terms of advocating and providing services for those veterans afflicted by funds. We are hoping that as a result of some of the testimony that was heard at this Senate hearing that there would be an opportunity for increased funding specific to this particular problem. That was, at least, partly contained in the comments by the Chairman at the conclusion of the hearings, so we will anxiously await hearing whether or not that funding will, in fact, be coming about.

Just one or two other things. I know we'll be meeting with Mr. Narciso in a moment, but I would like to also introduce who happens to be in the audience with us today, Frank Bania. Frank is the President of the United States Veterans Motorcycle Club of Long Island. A lot of people, when they think of these motorcycle organizations who work with the veterans groups providing the escorts and so many other types of assistance; furniture and clothing and food and so forth. They frequently are sort of lumped, everybody refers to them as the Patriot Guard Riders. PGR is also wonderful, but the USVMC and Franks's team do just an awful lot of work. They are, again, on a long list of unsung heroes, and I just wanted to thank him personally and thank him for joining us here today and acknowledge him being here and what they do on our behalf.

We recently held our employment fair at the Armed Forces Reserve Center in Farmingdale. I know Legislator Gregory was able to join us briefly. And it was an extremely, extremely successful event. We had 80 employers or providers of different sorts participating in the event. We saw in excess of 150 veterans, which given the nature of the venue, I thought was a pretty good number. It was sort of an unusual location to hold an event like this. But given its success, we are already negotiating with the Army to organize a follow-up and have another one, possibly as soon as May. So going forward, I'll keep you informed of that.

It was a very successful event. It's timely, because we're at a time right now with the drawdowns from Iraq, the impending drawdown in Afghanistan and the force reduction issues that we are confronting. We are going to be seeing a lot more service members coming home as I have testified in the past. So being prepared, identifying employers and identifying opportunities for these individuals when they return home is important. The group that we presented to at this event, interestingly enough, were primarily National Guard and Reserve. A lot of the National Guard are being confronted with the same issues that are active-duty elements are, and that is the funding.

As a result, a lot of individuals within the Guard who had projected or anticipated making careers or at least remaining in uniform for an extended period are not having their contracts renewed. So there were a lot of individuals who, six months ago, may have thought they were on a path to remain in the National Guard for some time, and they, in fact, will not be. So this was particularly relevant to the population that we were able to meet with at that event.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

All right. Director, thank you.

MR. RONAYNE:

Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

As always. John, can I have you come on up. Frank, you want to come on up as well. Director, you can remain, if you'd like. I'm sure as we go through the presentation, I'm sure questions will come up.

MR. RONAYNE:

I'll be happy to.

LEG. STERN:

Let's have you stay.

MR. NARCISO:

My name is John Narciso. I work under a Federal grant from the Small Business Administration to help veterans start business and in business particular. I'm the program coordinator for New York State.

Just a little bit about my background, I was in the Navy for 30 years, retired Navy Captain and had been working for the Small Business Administration and the Small Business Development Center in New York since 1994. The program that I work under is called the Veterans Business Outreach Program. It was signed out by President Clinton in 1999 for the express purpose of helping veterans start business and help those veterans who are in business.

I put together a packet for you, hopefully everybody has it now. Here's my card. But the thing I would ask you -- draw your attention to is the brochure here, [Calling All Veterans](#). This outlines the services that we provide on a one-on-one free counseling. And the setup in New York State is I'm the Program Coordinator, I have veterans in Albany, Buffalo and New York City, but there's also support by the 24 small business development centers throughout the State; Farmingdale is one and Stony Brook is the other small business development center here on Long Island.

I do want to comment on, I work with 62 County veterans service agents, directors throughout the State, and I want to compliment Tom, he's the best of the group. So you're very fortunate to have him as Director here. You can see besides the counseling, we work on business development. That's the brochure you see here, [Business Plan Guide](#). We help them in terms of providing assistance in terms of marketing assistance. I have a resource center in Albany that has access to any marketing information that is free to the veteran as he comes in and starts working on his or her business. We can get -- they do the grunt work for us so we can get information back in less than 15 days on any questions that are associated with the business.

We also do -- help in terms of entrepreneur training. We have monthly free workshops at the different small business development centers; Farmingdale and Stony Brook. We also help in terms of financial assistance. Part of your package is the [Patriot Express](#), which is a loan designated for veterans and their families. It goes up to \$500,000. It was started in 2008, it was renewed again in 2011 for another three years. It is through the banks, through SBA preferred lenders, such as TD Bank, HSBC and a variety of other Banks. It's for the veteran. The veteran must own 51% of the business, but you can use it for a variety of things. It goes up to \$500,000.

The other thing I would mention is that there are a number of franchises out there who are looking to help veterans. There's a program called VetFran Program that gives a discount to veterans who are starting their franchise. It's a very good program as far as that's concerned. All these services are administered through my office. And we'd be more than happy to help any veteran or member of their family.

The other thing that actually Tom and I were talking about earlier, the veterans also, particularly service-disabled veteran-owned businesses have a set-aside as far as Federal contracts. So we help in terms of the certification to obtain State and Federal contracts. These are just a number of services we provide. I've given you a poster that you can put wherever it's appropriate. We're holding an event on the 30th of this month. We hope to get as many veterans there and sort of have a one-stop-shop as far as that's concerned.

What the veteran brings to the table as far as a small business owner, he brings reliability, he brings maturity, he brings structure, he brings a preset skill level, which are all characteristics of good successful business owners, not only business owners, but employees. So we're looking at this event to bring as many veterans, hook them up with resources. And there are a variety of resources out there that the average veteran might not even know about. There's -- United Way has the Vet Bill Program that Congressman Israel has promoted, and there are a number of other programs out there available for the veteran.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Thank you. First of all, thank you for being with us today. Of course, thank you for your service and for your ongoing assistance to our veterans and their families. You have the upcoming event,

the Veterans Resource Day, the end of this month. Everybody has this poster, so, yes, I would reiterate the importance of helping to get this information out to everybody in our community that we can reach.

How often do you have these kinds of resource days in the community? Does it happen frequently, or is it once in a while? How often do we need to be on the lookout for it?

MR. NARCISO:

Probably annually is what I shoot for, but we have them as often as the supply and demand as far as that's concerned. If there's an interest, we'll hold something up. It's very good, particularly at Farmingdale State College, which we're a tenant there. They have the facility, so I can get whatever I need as far as resources there.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

With the information that we have in front of us, and that's just information provided by you and the organization -- as you mentioned, there are plenty of other programs available as well. So it appears as though there are an awful lot of different services that are being offered. How does a typical veteran or his or her family get this information? I assume that that's one of the biggest challenges is getting this information in the hands of our veterans so that they can take advantage of these services. How does your organization go about doing that? I'm sure my colleagues would want to know how we can help with that effort as well.

MR. NARCISO:

Well, sir, I would say that the key, of course, the internet, and websites are readily available as far as that's concerned, but working with Tom's organization, working with Nassau County service agencies, anybody -- anybody comes to Northport Hospital, there's information there. They know if anybody starts talking about a small business, a business of sort, they can contact me. It's as easy as that. It's a matter of getting the word out, and that's what I would hope this forum would be able to do. But I think the agencies around -- you can speak to that, Tom, if you would -- are readily available to help veterans whenever they're talking either business or employment.

MR. RONAYNE:

I think it's also important to note that any of the programs that our office conducts, whether they are the Homeless Veterans Stand Downs, the employment fairs, and of our programs, John and his office are always an active part of those events; they are always present, they are always participating, they are always proactive in their approach toward them. So in addition to anything that John does independently through his office, they are also very good partners with Suffolk County in being a part of any of our programs.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Legislator Montano.

LEG. MONTANO:

Thank you, Legislator Stern. John, how are you? John, I'm Rick Montano, I represent the 9th Legislative District. A couple of quick questions structurally in terms of the organization. Are you part of the SBA, or are you funded by the SBA?

MR. NARCISO:

I'm funded by a Federal grant. It's a five-year grant that started in 1999, it's been renewed twice. We're on the third iteration of the grant. It comes down through Congress.

LEG. MONTANO:

So it's an appropriation?

MR. NARCISO:

Yes, sir.

LEG. MONTANO:

Are you for-profit or not-for-profit?

MR. NARCISO:

I'd say we're non-for-profit.

LEG. MONTANO:

Okay. And you have a Board of Directors who run agency, or -- what's the affiliation between your group and SBA?

MR. NARCISO:

Well, we work through the New York State Small Business Development Center out of Albany.

LEG. MONTANO:

Oh, the State? I understand. That's different than the Federal SBA. Now, these loans that are available, you said that they're available up to maximum of 500,000?

MR. NARCISO:

Yes.

LEG. MONTANO:

And are these loans -- these loans are not given through the SBA. I don't think the SBA does anymore direct lending; am I correct on that?

MR. NARCISO:

You're correct. The SBA is administered through the SBA preferred lenders.

LEG. MONTANO:

Now, is that State or Federal?

MR. NARCISO:

No, that's a bank.

LEG. MONTANO:

Right, but I mean -- all right. So the bank has a Preferred Lenders Program.

MR. NARCISO:

Yes, it's blessed by the Small Business Administration that the loans would go through the bank, they then --

LEG. MONTANO:

Are they guaranteed by the SBA?

MR. NARCISO:

Yes, sir.

LEG. MONTANO:

Okay. So basically, if I were a veteran and I wanted to start a business and I need a loan, I would make application to the bank, and then I would make application to SBA, and if I got the loan, SBA would federally guarantee the loan; is that the way it works?

MR. NARCISO:

Well, not quite. Let me just clear up a couple of things.

LEG. MONTANO:

My history with SBA is dated, that's why I'm trying to get brought up to speed.

MR. NARCISO:

Hopefully you would come and see me, that would be a starting point. But besides that, we would go to the bank, the SBA preferred lender, say, Citibank as an example. The guarantee is from the SBA to the bank. The guarantee is not to the veteran.

LEG. MONTANO:

But if the business does not succeed and the loan is outstanding, then the Federal Government would pay off the loan?

MR. NARCISO:

No, sir.

LEG. MONTANO:

So what's the guarantee then.

MR. NARCISO:

The guarantee is just to the bank so there's less risk for the bank to do the small business loan to a start-up.

LEG. MONTANO:

What do you mean less risk, though?

MR. NARCISO:

Well, the guarantee, as an example, for the SBA is 70 or 85% on a loan. Okay. The risk for the bank if it's 85% is only 15%.

LEG. MONTANO:

Right, that's what I'm getting at. So the SBA would guarantee not the full loan, but would guarantee a portion of the loan. You're saying it guarantees up to 85% of the loan.

MR. NARCISO:

Yes, sir.

LEG. MONTANO:

All right. So if the business borrowed 500,000, it failed, the bank would be unable to collect from the veteran, they would collect from SBA up to 85%, is that what you're saying?

MR. NARCISO:

Well, that's usually the process. Hopefully, it doesn't get to that level.

LEG. MONTANO:

You mentioned the set-aside programs. Do you know how much -- these are both State and Federal set-asides?

MR. NARCISO:

Primarily it's Federal set-aside; 5% of the --

LEG. MONTANO:

Of all government contracts are set aside for --

MR. NARCISO:

Yes.

LEG. MONTANO:

And is this --

MR. NARCISO:

Service-disabled-owned businesses.

LEG. MONTANO:

Right. Is 5% just for the veterans, or does that include minority and women-owned businesses?

MR. NARCISO:

No, that's just for the veterans.

LEG. MONTANO:

Okay. So it's a 5% set-aside. What is the name of that program? Because I know that years back, the women and minority program was called Section 8 Aide Program. Do you know what it's called today? Does it have a name?

MR. NARCISO:

As far as the service-disabled veteran, that's the only thing I've ever heard it called.

LEG. MONTANO:

Service-disabled. What if you are veteran and not disabled, is there a set-aside?

MR. NARCISO:

No, sir.

LEG. MONTANO:

Are there other set-asides that you're aware of for other groups?

MR. NARCISO:

Well, there are set-asides for minority and women-owned businesses, yes.

LEG. MONTANO:

Okay. But that's a separate category and a separate program?

MR. NARCISO:

Yes, sir.

LEG. MONTANO:

I got you. Okay. Thanks a lot.

LEG. BARRAGA:

Just one question. What is the advantage for a veteran to use the Patriot Express Loan initiative versus putting in for a regular SBA loan? What does the Patriot Program have that the other doesn't have that makes it more advantageous for a veteran to use this one?

MR. NARCISO:

That's an excellent question, General. I wish I could tell you a good reason other than the fact that guarantees that I will work my butt off to make sure he gets a loan.

LEG. BARRAGA:

I see. So on the Patriot, you come into play?

MR. NARCISO:

Yes, sir.

LEG. BARRAGA:

Okay. So there isn't any lower interest rates, there isn't any less capital that has to be put up, nothing along those lines. Pretty much the same between both loans.

MR. NARCISO:

Yes, sir.

LEG. BARRAGA:

The difference is you.

MR. NARCISO:

Yes, sir.

LEG. BARRAGA:

Okay. Thank you.

MR. RONAYNE:

I think -- part of my understanding is that the veteran participating in the SBA Program would benefit from the advocacy on the part of the SBA, perceived and that that would in turn be perceived as beneficial to the veteran in his business pursuit.

LEG. BARRAGA:

Which is what John just told me, Tom. All right. I get it. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Legislator Gregory.

LEG. GREGORY:

Okay. Hi, John, how are you?

MR. NARCISO:

Fine, sir.

LEG. GREGORY:

Good. Someone I know very well just recommended your name to me today and speaks very highly of you. I'll talk to you offline about who that is. I have an issue in my district that I want to talk to you about. But from what I gather from the information that you've provided, we're saying veteran, but it's more like active service member, right, or is it --

MR. NARCISO:

No. We define a veteran as anybody who have served on active duty for 180 days.

LEG. GREGORY:

Okay, because some of the -- I haven't gone through all of it yet, but some of what I saw seems like active National Guard and Reservists, but it's for any veteran.

MR. NARCISO:

Yes.

LEG. GREGORY:

Okay. That's good information. Thank you.

MR. NARCISO:

Yes, sir.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Thank you. Thanks so much for being with us. I appreciate it.

MR. RONAYNE:

Chairman, if I could. Another point came to mind that I wanted to make sure that I clarified. I know Legislator Romaine had been on an e-mail string that had been generated at the end of the last week, and I just wanted to offer for his information and for all of you may have ultimately been similarly informed. There was an e-mail that was generated that included a photograph of a sign that was placed on the door of my Riverhead office. The photograph was pretty daunting. I was concerned honestly myself when I saw it.

Upon further inquiry, the sign was actually a large Post-it note that had been placed on the door next to the doorknob, not on the main door itself for all to see. But what had happened was the sign essentially said, "Please do not leave this door unlocked. This office may not be manned everyday," to that effect. Upon inquiry, the purpose of the note was not to inform people that the office was not going to be staffed, but that there were some sick days coming up by the person who was staffing that office and that when the maintenance people had come in to empty the trash in the office, they had left the door unlocked in the morning assuming that somebody would be in that morning to occupy the office. In fact, on at least one of those days, that was not the case.

To put any rumors to rest that may be circulating, and I know that there have been a few, our Riverhead office is operational, it is staffed, it is functioning, and it will remain so. That office is not closing, that office is not coming offline. We have a County Veteran Service Officer assigned to the office, and we have a New York State Division of Veterans Affairs reassigning a new service officer that will begin on March 15th to occupy that office as well. So we had two retirements; one from the County, one from the State. Both of those positions have been refilled. Ours is already staffed, the State will be coming in on March 15th. So, please, if there are questions, concerns or issues regarding closure of that office, please refer them to me and I will assure anybody who is willing to listen to me that we are not moving out of Riverhead.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Very good. Thank you. Legislator Romaine.

LEG. ROMAINE:

I just want to say thank you for that, much appreciated. I went to the retirement party of the gentleman who retired from Riverhead. I was happy to hear -- I know that you have your staffing challenges, and I'm sure as the year progresses, they will become vexing as we face some of the challenges that we are going to face financially. I appreciate it, because they are a lot of residents that live east of William Floyd Parkway that do use that service. Thank you.

MR. RONAYNE:

You're welcome. And just to put a point on it, be they vexing or not, nowhere in our job description that I recall did it say it would be easy. We'll do whatever is necessary to deliver the services to all veterans. If it's a challenge, then so be it, but that's why we're here.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Legislator Horsley.

LEG. HORSLEY:

Tom, I just wanted to let you know, you had called us on the Drive for Bethesda, and we're now upwards of 16 to 17,000 and climbing. Literally, they're falling out the door when I open up in the morning. It's really just heartwarming to see how many people have shown interest in helping out.

MR. RONAYNE:

Well, when that starts turning into tonnage, let me know. And if you need to get a truck over there --

LEG. HORSLEY:

We might. We're starting to look at -- you know, originally, we had the fire department was going to help us, but we're thinking is this going to fit in their bus. But anyway, we're looking at it. But it is heartwarming to see how much the people care.

MR. RONAYNE:

I've said it on other occasions, this is a good example of somebody being a victim of their our success.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Thank you.

MR. RONAYNE:

Thank you.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

Good afternoon, everybody. I just wanted to, I guess, let everybody know what the process was on the RFP for the central kitchen since it has come up today. A lot of this, Legislator Romaine, was in part of the e-mail I had sent you. So I just wanted to talk about it a little bit. The Office for Aging is obligated to follow the County's procurement policies. And in 2010, we did do an RFP for the central kitchen, and the American Red Cross was the successful bidder.

In 2011, ARC notified us that they would be unable to continue providing nutrition services after 2011. They were going back to their core mission, which did not include doing things such as catered meals. They said they would work with us until we could find someone. So we did an RFP out in June. We reached out -- prior to that, we reached out to a number of caterers that we knew were in the areas that might be interested, probably six or seven caterers we went to, including a couple of the college's caterers. We went to a couple of hospitals and we said, "Listen, this is going to be coming out in a couple of months. You might be interested." And we were really hoping for the best, because we were very anxious to keep the meals flowing in Brookhaven Town.

And just so you know, there is no other central kitchen in Suffolk County. Brookhaven is the only place we have one. All the other towns provide their own meals either through finding their own caterer or they cook the meals themselves at sites. So when we did the bid in June, it came back in August, and there was one bidder. The bidder we did not feel could meet our needs, so we could not go with them.

At the same time that was going on, we had to put a Request For Qualifications for all our nutrition programs, which we normally do every four to five years. So it was at that time -- it was time for that to happen, so that was going on. And because we only had one bidder for the central kitchen, we decided to do an addendum to the RFQ to request that the sites, particularly in Brookhaven Town, would find their own caterer if they needed to. So that was included in the RFQ.

When that came in a couple of months later, we looked at the sites, and some of them had done what we asked and they found caterers, others had not. And Red Cross, by the way -- I know this is all very confusing -- but Red Cross had two sites in Brookhaven Town, and they were pulling out of those sites as well. Brookhaven Town is now -- as of today, was the first day they are providing service. Brookhaven Town picked up the north, the Coram site, and they are bringing their people to Mount Sinai and Shoreham. On the south side, Brookhaven is bringing the congregate people to their Mastic site. So everybody has a place to go and a meal as of today.

On the home delivered meals, Brookhaven picked up the north side, and they're doing the home-delivered meals programs from Coram. And on the south side, American Center is doing the home-delivered meals for those people who are from the Red Cross. So we had a lot of things going on at once while we were doing this.

The decentralization of the kitchen has occurred in terms of the sites. Brookhaven Town, who has the largest number of meals, they have a caterer for their sites who they have been negotiating with all along. American Center has a caterer, Faith Baptist has a caterer, and Center Moriches also has a caterer. So everybody has meals in place effective April 27th when the catering from the central kitchen ends.

I can appreciate that Long Island Cares is interested in bidding on this program. However, we did not reach out to them back when we were looking for caterers in -- I guess in the spring, because they do not normally cater meals. They are not -- that's not what they are known for. So that was not someone who was on our radar in terms of doing catered food. They don't have the experience to run a central kitchen. And while they may keep the staff there, they're still program -- managing the program, I would be concerned if their staff left for whatever reason or if they got ill for whatever reason.

So at this stage of the game, we have told all the sites that they're the apparent successful bidders along with the cost of doing the meals within those contracts. That's all supposed to start April 27th with the caterers. I think this could be very chaotic if we went back to rebid, because of the fact that the central kitchen -- American Red Cross is planning on closing it April 27th, and I don't believe they could get out fast enough. And I don't know if these sites are interested in having another caterer at this point. So there's a lot of questions that would come up if we were to go out to rebid. And I would, at this point, recommend that we move forward with the plans that we have spent six or seven months trying to put in place because of the cards that we were dealt at the time.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Holly, before Red Cross decided to pull out, how long had they been providing these services for our residents?

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

Twenty-five years. I mean, they're a long-time caterer, did a great job. We have no qualms with the services they provided. They did an excellent job.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

So it was quite some time before --

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

Yes. And we started bidding out the programs approximately -- just before I got here, so approximately 15 years ago. And really, we have not had -- we have not really had a competitive bidding -- I mean, we do a bid, but nobody really bids on the program. So when we did not have a successful bid process in June, we held no hope that if we rebid it in the fall, when we only had the one bidder in August, that we get anybody, which is why we went to the decentralization of the kitchen.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

And those contracts have been awarded. They're about to -- at what point in the process are we there?

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

The sites were all given a letter saying, "You're the successful bidder under the RFQ for the sites." As part of that, they are also receiving the funding to provide the meals through the contracts that

they have with their caterers.

CHAIRMAN STERN:
Legislator Romaine.

LEG. ROMAINE:

First off all, I appreciate the predicament and your scramble to find replacements for the Red Cross. So let me ask you something. You're in touch with each of these nutrition centers, have they entered into an iron-clad contract that cannot be cancelled with their current providers -- soon to be current providers? Because, again, the Red Cross originally said they were going to pull out in June of 1012.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:
That was at our begging.

LEG. ROMAINE:

Right. So when did the April 27th date --

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

April came about because Brookhaven -- there was some confusion as to the date, and Brookhaven had gone to the caterer they were going to and had negotiated for them to start doing the meals April. They thought they were doing everybody starting March --

LEG. ROMAINE:

Are all the meals --

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

I do not know.

LEG. ROMAINE:

-- expiring April 27th?

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

The central kitchen is closing April 27th, the caterer contracts, I would assume would start April 30th. It's a Monday. But I do not know if --

LEG. ROMAINE:

And these are all iron-clad contracts that can't be cancelled.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

I do not know that, because they're not my contracts. They're contracts from the subs.

LEG. ROMAINE:

I would appreciate getting that information if you could gather that information.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

I do know that they spent quite a few months trying to negotiate these contracts. So I'm not sure that they would be looking at this favorably if we asked them to go through another process.

LEG. ROMAINE:

I don't have experience outside my district. All I know is in my district, we have the nutrition -- Moriches Nutrition Center, and I don't think they were particularly enamored with the idea of going to Hampton Bays.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

I don't think they were either.

LEG. ROMAINE:

So I think if there was another option, they would cancel tomorrow. And I don't know if they have an iron-clad contract. So I have concerns about that, because I think --

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

Their contract -- actually, the way that program is working is that we are contracted directly with Southampton for those meals.

LEG. ROMAINE:

When does your contract start with Southampton?

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

We have done a letter saying they're the successful bidder and that they would be getting the contracts. So with the contract --

LEG. ROMAINE:

Did that go to bid? Did that go to a bid?

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

It was part of the process when we were negotiating. It's an RFQ, so we're able to negotiate when we can.

LEG. ROMAINE:

Okay. Because I can tell you that a central kitchen, from what I've been able to gather -- and I could be wrong -- but from the facts that I've seen, operates far more efficiently, provides a lower cost meal, and since the kitchen and the facilities of the kitchen are provided free to the Brookhaven Lab -- by the Brookhaven Lab is a more cost effective way where you get a bigger bang for the buck from what I can discern so far.

Now, I don't have all the facts, but just a cursory glance tells me, wow, this is something that could cost us more, which means less meals for seniors. Now, just a thought that I'm putting out there, and the reason that I'm advocating for the central kitchen -- and Long Island Cares has some experience, and my understanding is that they would probably be working with the existing kitchen staff that would stop working for Red Cross and go to work for them. But putting that aside, how many meals have been cut this year from meals -- - from these nutrition meals?

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

All told, after we did the RFPs and the RFQs and every other letter of the alphabet, we added six percent of funding that we found within our budget, and we are only losing approximately, I think, 14,000 meals.

LEG. ROMAINE:

Fourteen thousand meals County-wide.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

I'm thinking it's 14,000, but I would have to check that.

LEG. ROMAINE:

So it's 14,000, but it could be potentially higher than that?

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

Not much higher.

LEG. ROMAINE:

But somewhere in that -- that's a good ballpark roughly, approximately, guesstimate that you would say. All right. All that -- of course, we've had this conversation -- disturbing me, because that means that there's people that are going to be hungry. There's going to be seniors, many of them --

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

Most of those meals were lost in your district because they were getting two meals a day when every other program we have gets one meal a day. Every other program we have in Suffolk County is a one-meal-a-day program. And because of the lost of funding -- and we did tell all the sites over a year ago that they needed to start looking at other alternatives than doing two meals a day, because we were really going to a Monday through Friday, one meal a day.

LEG. ROMAINE:

And most of these meals, let's be very clear, are Meals-on-Wheels for homebound, elderly that are sick and poor. Let me emphasize poor.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

No, they don't have to be. They do not have to be low income.

LEG. ROMAINE:

But many of them are.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

Many of them are, correct.

LEG. ROMAINE:

Because, obviously, if they have other options and they had money, they would exercise it. They would not depend on this.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

Our biggest criteria is that they're isolated and frail, so you're correct on that. We have 450, 460 people waiting for home-delivered meals in Suffolk County right now.

LEG. ROMAINE:

We do have a waiting list, we're cutting 14,000 meals County-wide, I will say this: That concerns me. I know everyone is very conscious of how we spend our money, but I've yet in my tenure as an elected official have someone come up to me and say, "How dare you spend money" -- a couple of dollars, I believe, it's a couple of dollars a meal -- "to send a hot meal over to a homebound senior, who, in most cases, are poor." I haven't had that -- that criticism as of yet.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

I absolutely agree with you. I absolutely agree with you. The concern is for me, Ed -- Legislator Romaine, my concern is that we went through a process that has been painful, extremely painful since last year. When we did the bid, I had one bidder that was not really viable for us. And if I do it again, there's no guarantee that, A, I will have a bidder, because they may look at it and run from the RFP, or I will get multiple bidders and the prices will all be too high. I do not know what will happen. And I need to keep this program running, and I'm not sure I could do that in the time frames we are in.

LEG. ROMAINE:

Could I ask you to do something for me, and I'm going to work with the Chairperson on this, possibly you could reach out to Long Island Cares and have a preliminary discussion, because even if that central kitchen can't serve seven or eight nutrition centers, they may be able to serve one or two that may be able -- that may feel that that's a far better option and that the cost there might be

better for them and they may be able to serve more meals. So I'm going to ask that you do that.

I'm not a member of this committee this year, but I'm going to work with the Chairperson, Legislator Stern, on this, because I think it is something that even at this late hour should be considered. I wish I had known more about this sooner last year, I didn't. I found out about this in the end of January because people started to call, and I've tried to work on this issue ever since. But had I known last year, I would have tried to address this issue, but it does affect so many people in precarious positions in a county where hunger is a growing issue. But if you could do that, I would appreciate that. Thank you again for keeping us posted.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

I certainly will do that. The only thing I do want to end this with is that every senior who received a meal is still getting a meal. And every senior who went to a site has a site available to them. And that was a huge, huge success for us, because six months ago, I wasn't sure we were going to be able to say that. So I just wanted to leave it at that.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

I just want to clarify that, because I think that's important. Two things, and correct me if I'm wrong; one, everybody who received a meal is still receiving a meal; and two, as to that 14 thousand somewhat number, that only impacts the number of meals that a particular person might be getting, but if you were receiving, then you're still going to receive.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

There might have been a little bit of a loss elsewhere, but most of the loss was in the two-meal-a-day-seven-day-a-week program.

LEG. ROMAINE:

I will say, unfortunately with the Red Cross, there was an article in Newsday that appeared in the Brookhaven section that said Left Waiting. I'm not involved in this article, but I did see it in the newspapers. And this has to do with the centers that were closing down, many of those seniors don't want to be bused from Coram to Mount Sinai.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

They starting today, they had two full buses.

LEG. ROMAINE:

Okay. All right.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

I got that as I was leaving.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Legislator Gregory.

LEG. GREGORY:

Hi, Holly, how are you? I know that your discussions thus far generally or solely was focused on Brookhaven, but as you know, in Babylon, we have senior centers and a nutrition center, which is actually in my district. Does this same issue apply to the centers in my district?

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

Not so much. The central kitchen was unique to Brookhaven Town, and it's just the way services evolved. In your town, they cook their meals in the Town of Babylon. And their home-delivered meals they do not do in the Town of Babylon, they are run by Catholic Charities. So those programs -- they did have to respond for the RFQ that we did for the sites, that's been done. We are done with that. So you don't have an issue in the Town of Babylon.

LEG. GREGORY:

I knew there was some issues with meals and trying to work something out with Catholic Charities, but it's separate, I'm gathering, because we do have our own kitchen.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

I'm not sure what that is. I'm not sure what's going on with Catholic Charities and the Town of Babylon.

LEG. GREGORY:

Probably a year ago, and I'm still hearing some rumblings about a little bit of an issue where I guess the towns contract with the County, and there were people that weren't getting meals, and Catholic Charities was able to pick up about 80% of the people that were no longer getting meals.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

Catholic Charities has a fairly long waiting list for the home-delivered meal program. Town of Babylon does not do home-delivered meals. They're one of the few towns that did not ever pick that up.

LEG. GREGORY:

Okay. All right. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Under this decentralization model, you had said that the Town of Brookhaven has a certain portion of town, and that they have arrangements with companies, and then there are others for the other parts of town. Do you have any idea what that breakdown is that the town itself has taken on that responsibility to contract -- what percentage is that?

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

I believe the town has the bulk of the meals and American Center would have the next biggest group. Center Moriches and Faith Baptist would have a smaller amount.

LEG. STERN:

Maybe going forward, if it would be possible to get that breakdown, I think that would be helpful.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

I can do that.

LEG. STERN:

Great. Legislator Anker.

LEG. ANKER:

Holly, I just want to thank you for all the work that you've been doing, especially with this -- you know, the food pantry situation. I know you are working closely with the Town of Brookhaven to continue the programs. Again, it's a difficult issue. We have all brainstormed, and you've been able to facilitate a good result. So I want to thank you.

I also want to thank you for attending the senior information meeting that we had at Leisure Village. I have gotten so much great feedback of all the programs that the seniors there, they did not know about. And we were able to present them with their senior cards and let them know that there are so many discounts. The sheet that we had probably had well over 50 discounts. Whether it's 10% from Applebees or, you know, CVS, there are discounts. And what happens is if the senior doesn't ask for that discount, they will not be given the discount. Again, that was part of it. And of course, the other part was all the wonderful information that you brought that the County provides. So again, thank you so much for helping out with that.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

Thank you. I just wanted to tell you, on your list, I think you have Dunkin' Donuts, and I was in Dunkin' Donuts by the Ronkonkoma Train Station yesterday, and I saw the sign that if you had an AARP card, you could get your discount; a free doughnut with your coffee. Now, I'm starting to watch after looking at your list. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Holly, thank you. We have one resolution before us.

1171, Designating April as month of the Military Child.

I'm going to table this for one cycle. I make a motion to table, seconded by Legislator Montano. All in favor? Opposed? Abstentions? IR 1171 is **TABLED (VOTE: 5-0-0-0)**.

Anybody else? Thank you very much.

(*THE MEETING WAS ADJOURNED AT 2:02 P.M.*)

{ } DENOTES BEING SPELLED PHONETICALLY