



Mr. Tom Allon, President / Publisher
City & State
61 Broadway, Suite 1315
New York, NY, 10006

July 10, 2018

Dear Mr. Allon,

Last month, I consented to receive an award from *City & State* at a veterans event; I was truly humbled to be nominated for recognition of my work in establishing and leading the NYC Veterans Alliance. Shortly after my acceptance, your representative reached out with the following request of the NYC Veterans Alliance:

I thought you may want to partner around this issue and event for visibility, thought leadership, and support for NY veterans and reach NY Government officials, veterans, and industry leaders. (22 May 2018, 4:26PM)

As the only nonprofit dedicated to local-level policy advocacy for veterans and families, we were thrilled at this proposal to partner and collaborate on an event focusing on veterans policy in New York. As part of a community that is too often relegated only to symbolic or tokenized thanks in lieu of substantive measures to improve the lives of military members, veterans, and our families—our team was excited to discuss partnering with *City & State* to deliver a truly meaningful issue and event to give voice to the needs and experiences of our broadly diverse NYC veterans community.

Veterans as a community are too often tokenized while we continue to be underserved. My organization receives weekly, sometimes daily, “casting calls”—which are often grotesque in their requests for women veterans of specific descriptions, veterans with prosthetics, gay and transgender veterans, veterans with service animals, even once the shocking request for “mutilated” veterans to be featured by media. The vast majority of these requests have no benefit to anyone other than the media outlet requesting them. One of the unseen burdens of working in the veterans space is being made acutely aware on a continuous basis how veterans are seen as a commodity to be turned as a profit—rather than as vital, active members of a community who deserve to be seen, heard, valued, collaborated with, and authorities on our own lives and experiences.

It was therefore a disappointment to learn in an email the next day that this wasn’t at all the offer being made—it was simply a coded request for us to spend the precious donations made by members and supporters of our cause to purchase advertising in *City & State* magazine. The only opportunity to be part of the event’s “thought leadership” would likewise require a hefty portion of our limited funding.

I suggested that the best way to honor the contributions of the NYC Veterans Alliance is to honor the work we do. I offered to collaborate and participate in the program in lieu of any award, which I received no response on other than another request for payment for the opportunity. I suggested stories and policies for you to cover in the veterans issue. I gave time for an interview by your intern about a number of issues the Alliance is spearheading—only for the Alliance’s work to receive no mention in the published article.

Further, the finalized list of “thought leaders” includes a City Councilman who has been explicit with me that he cannot support the full equality of lesbian, gay, bi, transgender, or queer veterans or servicemembers. There also is no inclusion of women or LGBTQ veterans in the programming—a terrible omission, in that these marginalized veterans are either completely invisible (as evidenced here) or grossly exploited in image, but offered little or no benefit or agency. Had your offer of partnership not been a mere request for payment, we could’ve helped you avoid these exclusionary and offensive programmatic shortcomings.

This letter is to inform you that I cannot in good conscience attend or be part of a program that fails to include the voices of women veterans, that casts an exclusionary shadow on LGBTQ veterans, and that prioritizes using veterans to generate revenue, but with limited or no input or attribution. My hope is that other veterans and veteran organizations do see some tangible benefit from your monetized event and issue.

I request that any individuals or organizations returning tickets to you for this reason will be offered a prompt and full refund.

Please reach out to me at kristen@nycveteransalliance.org or 929-427-2301 if I can offer any further explanation.

In service,



Kristen L. Rouse
U.S. Army Veteran – OEF (Afghanistan) VII, X, and XII
President & Founding Director
NYC Veterans Alliance