



JTF-NCR 58th Presidential Inauguration meet media, share credit, lay out plans for 45th Commander in Chief

By: Delonte Harrod

Members of the Joint Task Force — National Capital Region, 58th Presidential Inauguration set aside time on Nov 17 to answer questions from the media about the 2017 inauguration in which President-elect Donald J. Trump will be sworn in as the 45th President of the United States of America.

The roundtable panel consisted of U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Bradley A. Becker, JTF-NCR commander, U.S. Air Force Brig. Gen. George M. Degnon, JTF-NCR deputy commander for Inaugural Support, Michael D. Wagner, National Events Planner Chief for JTF-NCR and Military District of Washington, Command Sgt. Maj. Paul Biggs, senior enlisted advisor to the Commanding General, U.S. Coast Guard Cmdr. Michelle Watson, Joint Team — Cordon, and U.S. Marine Corps Master Sgt. Duane King, drum major of the "The President's Own" United States Marine Band.

The panel was held at Brucker Hall on Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall. Though Becker is the leader of the joint task force, he stated at the roundtable that neither he nor the U.S. Army could take absolute credit for what the team has accomplished. He thanked his colleagues from other military branches for the privilege to work alongside them to accomplish the goal of planning for the inaugural ceremonies.

"This is truly a team effort," Becker said. "What you see at the [2017] inauguration is not just the U.S. Army Military District of Washington, it is a team effort; all the services are represented. We just happen to be the lead organization; this is a part of the Joint Task Force that brings it all together."

The U.S. military has participated in Presidential Inaugural ceremonies since April 30, 1789. In that year, Revolutionary War veterans, U.S. Army and local militia units escorted George Washington to Federal Hall in New York City.

Reporters asked questions pertaining to national security, correspondence with President-elect Donald J. Trump's inaugural committee and the tradition of participating in the inaugural events.

Since 10 days had passed since Trump's election the questions of whether the Joint Task Force had spoken to the president-elect's committee was the center of the discussion. Wagner responded that they had begun discussions with the president-elect's inaugural committee.

"The Presidential Inaugural Committee is just getting organized," said Wagner. "We are just starting to see names of their leadership identified and they will make decisions about special events and concerts."

The president-elect's committee will ultimately decide the events during the Inaugural period and will modify or approve any pre-planning the Joint Task Force has accomplished so far. However, Wagner said, so far, Trump's team hasn't contacted them about "any special events, opening ceremonies or any special concerts."

"We haven't seen any of those decisions yet," Wagner said.

But what would happen if the president-elect were to change his mind on what happens at the ceremony?

If Trump's Presidential Inaugural Committee recommends changing events from what has already been preplanned, Wagner said they can support the changes.

"We have the immense capability within the service honor guard and premier bands here in the National Capital Region to support just about any kind of ceremony event one could imagine," said Wagner. "Those forces are available to us. We have the ability to adapt to any situation."

"Whatever the president-elect's committee recommends, we will support," added Brig. Gen. George Degnon.

Donald Trump's election has elicited protests around the country. According to one New York publication, the Rev. Al Sharpton has already planned to protest the Jan. 20 ceremonies in Washington D.C.

Has this reality caused the task force to change routes?

"From a ceremonial perspective, there really isn't any change to what we are going to do. Our job

is to honor the commander in chief, so that doesn't change," said Becker. "In regards to security — the United States Secret Service is the lead agency with regard to security and they are supported by the D.C. Metropolitan, U.S. Capitol, National Park Police and numerous other federal, state and local law enforcement agencies. As a Joint Task Force, we do provide them some capabilities, but Secret Service is the lead agency."

Becker added that protesting in America is protected by the Constitution.

"One of the beauties in this country is that we get to choose our leaders every four years, and there are some people who may feel they didn't get the outcome they wanted, so they have the right to protest," said Becker. "That is another thing that is protected in our country."

Reporters also asked about the music that will be provided by the "President's Own" United States Marine Band. This year, Master Sgt. King will lead the band. It is his first time participating in a presidential inaugural event.

"It is a tremendous honor to be part of something like this," said King. "It's actually a little scary, because of the enormity of what we are doing. You don't want to ever mess up a performance, much less the first time the new president gets to see you — so there is pressure on everybody to do their best."

The Pentagram asked Cmdr. Watson, who is commanding the 1,523 service members representing all branches of the military who will line the parade route and execute a hand salute honoring the outgoing president and vice president as they proceed to Capitol Hill on Inauguration day and then salute Donald J. Trump as he travels to the White House for the first time as the president and commander in chief, about her experience with performing this task.

"When we render that salute, we represent all the millions of service members around the world," she said. "I have a tremendous pride to represent all those service members."