



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Samra G. Brouk

Brouk Inducts Nick Stefanovic into New York State Senate Veterans Hall of Fame

SAMRA G. BROUK August 30, 2024

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ROCHESTER, NY - Senator Samra Brouk honored retired Platoon Sergeant Nick Stefanovic today by celebrating his induction into the New York State Senate Veterans Hall of Fame and was joined by over 100 officials, family, friends, peers, and service members.

As the Chair of the Senate Mental Health Committee, Senator Brouk was honored to present Nick Stefanovic with this award to thank him for his years of service in our nation's Armed

Forces, and for helping our veterans overcome the many challenges that they face.

Stefanovic was born and raised in Monroe County. In response to the attacks on September 11, Stefanovic left to join the Marine Corps in 2002. He was deployed multiple times over 4 years in Afghanistan and other countries.

After returning home from service in 2006, Stefanovic faced a number of challenges while transitioning to civilian life. In 2009, Stefanovic battled addiction and substance abuse, alternating between hotel rooms and a homeless encampment under a bridge. Seeking help, he entered the Rochester Veterans Treatment Court under the advice of Judge Patricia Marks. Stefanovic credits this program and Marks with saving his life.

Stefanovic earned his bachelor's and master's degrees from SUNY Brockport. He began working as a substance abuse therapist and later transitioned to public administration, working on reintegration programs for incarcerated individuals with the National Institute of Corrections and Bureau of Prisons.

In 2018, Stefanovic was appointed Director of the Monroe County Veterans Service Agency, working under County Executive Adam Bello. In recognition of their impactful work, Stefanovic and his team received accolades ranging from local offices to the President of the United States.

Throughout his career, Stefanovic has garnered numerous awards. He was honored as a Forty under 40 recipient, Gates Chili Hall of Fame inductee, Kiwanis Veteran to Veteran awardee, Vietnam Veterans of America Service Officer of the Year awardee, and recipient of the John R. Schwartz Accountability Meets Compassion Award. He serves on various boards and committees and is the former Chair of the War on Terror Memorial Committee.

This year, Stefanovic pioneered the first county-funded nature-based therapy program for Veterans nationwide. Building upon this foundation, he is currently working to promote accessible alternative treatments for individuals grappling with trauma and mental health.

Senator Samra G. Brouk (SD-55), Chair of the Senate Committee on Mental Health: "Today, we celebrate the induction of Nick Stefanovic into the NYS Senate Veterans Hall of Fame in recognition of his exemplary service to our community. As the Director of Monroe County's Veteran Service Agency, Nick created the first county-funded, nature-based therapy for Veterans in our nation. He continues to provide access and valuable resources for individuals experiencing trauma as well as mental health and substance abuse crises. Most importantly, Nick has demonstrated how one can empower themselves and use the most difficult moments of their lives to create better outcomes for others. Nick's approach to assisting individuals with mental health needs mirrors the principles that I support as Chair of the Senate Mental Health Committee—especially where it comes to supporting programs that train culturally competent peers. His lived experiences will undoubtedly inspire others to serve their communities for years to come."

Nick Stefanovic: "I'm deeply appreciative to Senator Brouk for this honor and even more so grateful to her for her advocacy regarding Veterans and Mental Health. About a week after Samra was first elected I received a call on my cell from her simply to ask how she could be helpful, and since then she has been a significant advocate for us. It is time to start thinking outside the box when it comes to the issue of mental health and Senator Brouk has championed that philosophy. We should not accept nearly two dozen Veterans per day dying by suicide."

Monroe County Executive Adam Bello: "Nick Stefanovic's journey is reflective of so many veterans of his generation, deeply impacted by the events of 9/11 and moved by a spirit of patriotism to join the armed services. His service with the United States Marine Corps in

Afghanistan is a testament to his courage and commitment to our country. Upon returning home, Nick's re-entry into civilian life was filled with trials and tribulations, experiences shared by many in our veteran community. Through tough love, a bit of luck, and a tireless work ethic, Nick forged his way forward into the beautiful and successful life he has today. I am proud to have Nick Stefanovic serve as the leader of Monroe County's Veterans Service Agency as a servant leader, with lived experience, who is an unwavering champion of veterans. Everyday Nick and his team help our veterans connect with the supports and services they've earned and in doing so reshape their future. His service, his journey, and his commitment to his fellow veterans make him incredibly deserving to be inducted into the New York State Senate Veterans Hall of Fame, and I am grateful to Senator Brouk for bestowing this honor upon him."

Brighton Town Judge Vik Vilku: "Nick Stefanovic is a living, breathing, example of the power of restorative justice. I congratulate Nick and his family on his award but at the same time remind all of us in the community that there are right now other people just like Nick who need a helping hand in a time of need. I pray we as a community recommit ourselves to honor Nick's strength by not throwing people away when they are broken. Rather, we must elect to lift our neighbors up so that they may see what they are capable of achieving."

John Demarco, Retired Monroe County Judge: "Regardless of the industry, the Hall of Fame reflects inductees whose high level of performance and accomplishments over a career are recognized as extraordinary amongst their peers. Nick's efforts and the impact of his service to the Veteran community are just that - sustained and extraordinary. Truly, a very deserving honor. "

Erin Stefanovic, Nick's Wife: "Our family is honored and humbled that Senator Brouk selected Nick to be inducted into the New York State Veterans Hall of Fame. While we know that Nick did not choose a life of service for accolades and recognition our family is so very

grateful to see that his hard work has not gone unnoticed.”