107th Attack Wing

Western New York Native Promoted to Colonel in U.S. Air Force:
Spectrum News, October 18, 2020:

Barker man takes charge of 107th Mission Support Group:
Union Sun and Journal, October 19, 2020:

Barker resident Steven Hefferon promoted to colonel in New York Air National Guard:
Niagara Frontier Publications, October 20, 2020:

42nd Combat Aviation Brigade

NY Army Guard has 1st 'street to seat' Black Hawk pilot:
Nationalguard.mil, By Tech. Sgt. Ryan Campbell | New York National Guard | Oct. 19, 2020:

NY Army Guard has 1st 'street to seat' Black Hawk pilot:
Army.mil, By Tech. Sgt. Ryan Campbell, New York National Guard, October 19, 2020:

Airmen and Soldiers

Promotions awarded to Central New York area service members:
Utica Observer Dispatch, October 19, 2020:

Beshar Scholars Military Service Award: SPC Eric Bardales ’21 Sets His Sights on Becoming a Federal Law Enforcement Officer:
John Jay. com, October 22, 2020

Counter Drug Task Force

PAIN MANAGEMENT DOCTOR GOING TO PRISON FOR 70 MONTHS FOR CONSPIRING TO DISTRIBUTE CONTROLLED SUBSTANCES AND HEALTH CARE FRAUD:
Genesee Sun, com, October 16, 2020:

COVID19

NY National Guard continues statewide COVID-19 response:
Army.mil, October 20, 2020:

National Guard troops appear at Rochester, Syracuse airports to enforce quarantine mandates from NYS:
Finger Lakes1. com, October 20, 2020

New York National Guard members assisting with travel advisory screenings at upstate airports:
WROC, October 20, 2020:

Cuomo Administration Insists NY Is Too Broke To Help Fund The "Most Critical" Election Of Our Lives:
Gothamist, October 20, 2020:
Small group protests report of pending New York Army National Guard to airports: WGRZ, October 19, 2020:

New York efforts to keep out COVID gets more muscle but also more complications: WHEC, October 19, 2020:

NY National Guard continues statewide COVID-19 response: National Guard.mil, By Col. Richard Goldenberg | New York National Guard | Oct. 19, 2020:

How New York’s mis-steps let Covid-19 overwhelm the US: City leaders saw the threat but did not act: why arguments and rivalries among politicians and power groups allowed disaster to unfold: Financial times, October 22, 2020:

New York National Guard deployed to airports to help enforce mandatory travel quarantines: WKBW, October 16, 2020:

Gov. Cuomo Unveils Initial Framework For New York’s Delivery Of COVID-19 Vaccine To Residents: CBS2, October 18, 2020:

National Guard to help with travel advisory screenings at airports: WVIB, October 16, 2020:

New York Air National Guard

Duty Calls: Top enlisted Air Guard leader retires: New York Air National Guard Command Chief Master Sgt. Maureen Dooley honored: Times Union, October 19, 2020:

New York Army National Guard

Army Guard: warfight capable and responsive to governors: army.mil, October 18, 2020:

Military working dogs in Iraq get a blood bank like their humans have (NYARNG Soldier in photo): Stars and Stripes, October 22, 2020

PFOA Issue

Schumer: Stewart Air Guard base PFAS cleanup could be delayed indefinitely: Midhudson News, October 21, 2020:

107th Attack Wing

Western New York Native Promoted to Colonel in U.S. Air Force
BUFFALO, N.Y. – A Western New Yorker is moving up in the ranks of the United States Air Force.

Steven Heffron is originally from Barker. He's been serving in the air force since 1986, most recently working at the Niagara Falls air reserve.

Saturday, he was promoted to the rank of colonel. He also took over command of the 107th mission support group.

Fellow members of the 107th say Heffron is someone to look up to.

"Steve is a great role model. He's came from a list of ranks so to emulate to that rising from the enlisted to a commanding officer," said 107th Attack Wing Commander Gary Charlton. "He's definitely been a phenomenal role model, he's a great mentor, (and) he's a great peer. I lean heavily on him for guidance and wisdom."

Colonel Heffron will handle logistics, security forces, and personnel requirements for the 107th.

From June to December 2009 Hefferon served as the chief of operations of the Allied Movement Coordination Center at Air Force Base Eindhoven, the Netherlands.

His awards include the Defense Meritorious Service Medal, the Meritorious Service Medal, the Air Force Commendation Medal and the Air Force Achievement Medal.

His military education includes Air Command and Staff College, Air War College, and the National Security Management Course at Syracuse University.


Barker resident Steven Hefferon promoted to colonel in New York Air National Guard

Niagara Frontier Publications, October 20, 2020 ::

New York Air National Guard Col. Steven M. Hefferon, a Barker resident, was promoted from lieutenant colonel during a ceremony conducted by the 107th Attack Wing at Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station on Saturday, Oct. 17.

Hefferon, who entered the Air Force in 1986, serves as the mission support group commander for the wing.

Hefferon served in the Active Air Force from 1986-88, when he joined the New York Air National Guard. He was commissioned as an officer in 1994 after earning a degree from the State University of New York, Cortland.

His assignments have included supply officer, chief of supply, commander of the wing logistics readiness squadron, comptroller flight commander for the wing, and deputy mission support commander.

From June to December 2009, Hefferon served as the chief of operations of the Allied Movement Coordination Center at Air Force Base Eindhoven, the Netherlands.

His awards include the Defense Meritorious Service Medal, the Meritorious Service Medal, the Air Force Commendation Medal and the Air Force Achievement Medal.

His military education includes Air Command and Staff College, Air War College, and the National Security Management Course at Syracuse University.

LATHAM, N.Y. – Lars Olson, a 23-year-old who is going directly from “street to seat’ to become a New York Army National Guard UH-60 helicopter pilot, was recognized during an Oct. 16 ceremony at the Army Aviation Support Facility.

It’s unusual for a recruit to join the Army National Guard and go directly to pilot training school, said Sgt. 1st Class Barbara Morgan, Olson’s recruiter. Normally, a Guard Soldier has to serve for a while and then apply for acceptance to flight school, she said.

Under the “street-to-seat” program, the Chatham resident and small business owner will go directly to Warrant Officer Candidate School after graduating basic training, followed by Initial Entry Rotary Wing Training.

He will then be assigned to 3rd Battalion, 142nd Aviation, headquartered in Latham, flying their UH-60 Black Hawk aircraft.

Olson officially joined the Army at the Albany Military Entrance Processing Station Oct. 14. But his family could not be there because of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, so the battalion conducted a second ceremony for Olson so his family could be present.

He is the first Soldier to join a New York Army National Guard aviation unit through this program, Morgan said.

“It was something I saw active duty could do,” said Olson. “I wanted to stay close to home, be part of the community, and serve the community.”

That’s when he contacted Morgan, a recruiter at New York National Guard headquarters in Latham. The process was long and tedious because of delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, but Olson was determined to get it done.

“He was scheduled to get a flight physical at Fort Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania, but they weren’t able to do the eye exam,” said Morgan. “This was in March and everything was shut down in New York, so he scheduled it on his own and the closest place was in West Virginia.”

Making the trek to West Virginia with his parents, then on to Pennsylvania, Olson was able to get everything completed within a couple of months.
“The process was brand new to the New York National Guard,” said Olson. “We kind of just rolled with the punches and figured out how to get it done.”

It was a process that began when Olson said he initially planned on going to law school but decided that wasn’t the path for him.

“I was sitting at home and said, you know what, that’s really not what I want to do,” said Olson. “I wanted to do something more, and this is what I came up with.”

The idea came from his father, John, who served in the Army in Vietnam from 1967 to 1968, earning a Purple Heart and Bronze Star with valor.

“He always spoke really highly of the helicopter pilots that he knew in Vietnam,” said Olson.

His father said he thought it was a great opportunity for Lars.

“I think the public really underrates the opportunity the National Guard delivers to young people today, and I’m very excited for him,” John Olson said.

He said he spent 15 months in Vietnam, an experience he wouldn’t trade for anything.

Flying into combat on many occasions, John called helicopters “the cavalry of today’s military.”

As the only staff photographer permanently assigned to the Stars and Stripes newspaper, John said he relied on Army helicopters to take him into battles such as Khe Sahn and Hue, two of the biggest engagements of the war.

Over the course of the next 10 weeks, Lars will be leaving behind his business providing group and private tennis lessons and will be the Army’s newest Warrant Officer Candidate after what he described as a lot of effort by his recruiter.

“I have to give Sgt. Morgan a lot of credit,” said Lars. “She stuck with it and was able to do a lot of the legwork.”

Held at Fort Rucker, Alabama, Initial Entry Rotary Wing Training is 32 weeks long. Lars will receive a helicopter instrument rating after graduating.

Lars said this is all part of many things he is looking forward to accomplishing.

“Learning to fly, moving away from here for a little bit, experiencing something new and seeing other parts of the country,” said Lars. “And then I can’t wait to come back here and be part of the community again.”

“I got my wish,” Olson said after reciting the enlistment oath in front of one of 3/142’s Black Hawk helicopters.
NY Army Guard has 1st 'street to seat' Black Hawk pilot

Army.mil, By Tech. Sgt. Ryan Campbell, New York National Guard, October 19, 2020:

LATHAM, N.Y. – Lars Olson, a 23-year-old who is going directly from "street to seat" to become a New York Army National Guard UH-60 helicopter pilot, was recognized during an Oct. 16 ceremony at the Army Aviation Support Facility.

It’s unusual for a recruit to join the Army National Guard and go directly to pilot training school, said Sgt. 1st Class Barbara Morgan, Olson’s recruiter. Normally, a Guard Soldier has to serve for a while and then apply for acceptance to flight school, she said.

Under the “street-to-seat” program, the Chatham resident and small business owner will go directly to Warrant Officer Candidate School after graduating basic training, followed by Initial Entry Rotary Wing Training.

He will then be assigned to 3rd Battalion, 142nd Aviation, headquartered in Latham, flying their UH-60 Black Hawk aircraft.

Olson officially joined the Army at the Albany Military Entrance Processing Station Oct. 14. But his family could not be there because of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, so the battalion conducted a second ceremony for Olson so his family could be present.

He is the first Soldier to join a New York Army National Guard aviation unit through this program, Morgan said.

“It was something I saw active duty could do,” said Olson. “I wanted to stay close to home, be part of the community, and serve the community.”

That’s when he contacted Morgan, a recruiter at New York National Guard headquarters in Latham. The process was long and tedious because of delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, but Olson was determined to get it done.

“He was scheduled to get a flight physical at Fort Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania, but they weren’t able to do the eye exam,” said Morgan. “This was in March and everything was shut down in New York, so he scheduled it on his own and the closest place was in West Virginia.”

Making the trek to West Virginia with his parents, then on to Pennsylvania, Olson was able to get everything completed within a couple of months.
“The process was brand new to the New York National Guard,” said Olson. “We kind of just rolled with the punches and figured out how to get it done.”

It was a process that began when Olson said he initially planned on going to law school but decided that wasn’t the path for him.

“I was sitting at home and said, you know what, that’s really not what I want to do,” said Olson. “I wanted to do something more, and this is what I came up with.”

The idea came from his father, John, who served in the Army in Vietnam from 1967 to 1968, earning a Purple Heart and Bronze Star with valor.

“He always spoke really highly of the helicopter pilots that he knew in Vietnam,” said Olson.

His father said he thought it was a great opportunity for Lars.

“I think the public really underrates the opportunity the National Guard delivers to young people today, and I’m very excited for him,” John Olson said.

He said he spent 15 months in Vietnam, an experience he wouldn’t trade for anything.

Flying into combat on many occasions, John called helicopters “the cavalry of today’s military.”

As the only staff photographer permanently assigned to the Stars and Stripes newspaper, John said he relied on Army helicopters to take him into battles such as Khe Sahn and Hue, two of the biggest engagements of the war.

Over the course of the next 10 weeks, Lars will be leaving behind his business providing group and private tennis lessons and will be the Army’s newest Warrant Officer Candidate after what he described as a lot of effort by his recruiter.

“I have to give Sgt. Morgan a lot of credit,” said Lars. “She stuck with it and was able to do a lot of the legwork.”

Held at Fort Rucker, Alabama, Initial Entry Rotary Wing Training is 32 weeks long. Lars will receive a helicopter instrument rating after graduating.

Lars said this is all part of many things he is looking forward to accomplishing.

“Learning to fly, moving away from here for a little bit, experiencing something new and seeing other parts of the country,” said Lars. “And then I can’t wait to come back here and be part of the community again.”

“I got my wish,” Olson said after reciting the enlistment oath in front of one of 3/142’s Black Hawk helicopters.
Airmen and Soldiers

Promotions awarded to Central New York area service members

Utica Observer Dispatch, October 19, 2020:

Local military members recently promoted include:

The New York Air National Guard's 224th Air Defense Group (ADG) recently promoted several Airmen in recognition of their capability for additional responsibility and leadership.

Promoted Airmen include Jenna Ford, of Oneida, to Airman 1st Class. Ford is an aerospace medical technician with the 224th Support Squadron.

The New York Air National Guard's 224th Air Defense Group (ADG) recently promoted several officers in recognition of their capability for additional responsibility and leadership.

Promoted officers include Anthony Mara, of West Edmeston, to Major. Mara directs the logistics and civil engineering sections at the 224th Support Squadron.

The New York Air National Guard's 224th Air Defense Group (ADG) recently promoted five senior noncommissioned officers (NCOs) in recognition of their capability for additional responsibility and leadership.

Promoted senior NCOs include Carrie Pelland, of Canastota, to Senior Master Sergeant. Pelland is a flight superintendent at the 224th ADS.

Major General Ray Shields, the Adjutant General for the State of New York, announced the recent promotion of members of the New York Army National Guard in recognition of their capability for additional responsibility and leadership.

Jared Smith from Hubbardsville, who is assigned to the Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 108th Infantry Regiment, received a promotion to the rank of private first class.


Return to top
Winning a scholarship for many students can be the difference between being laser focused on their classes or being distracted by the demand of having to work a job, or two, in order to pay for tuition. For John Jay graduate student Eric Bardales '21, a Specialist/E4 and Infantryman in the New York Army National Guard, receiving the Beshar Scholars Military Service Award provides financial relief while earning his master's degree in Criminal Justice with an Advanced Certificate in Terrorism Studies. “Without the Beshar Scholars Military Service Award I would be forced to use my G.I. Bill housing stipend to pay for my tuition and I’d have to find other means of income to support myself during this time,” says Bardales. “The Beshar Scholars Military Service Award virtually eliminates the cost of this semester at John Jay, giving me the privilege and opportunity to focus all my efforts on my studies.” We spoke with Bardales to learn more about his role in the military and how the Beshar Scholars Military Service Award brings him closer to his future goals.

“What without the Beshar Scholars Military Service Award I would be forced to use my G.I. Bill housing stipend to pay for my tuition and I’d have to find other means of income to support myself during this time.” —Eric Bardales

What drew you to joining the military?

I chose to enlist in the military after earning my bachelor’s degree in Criminal Justice from the University of Albany in December 2018. While I was an undergraduate, I joined the Army Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) program and learned a great deal not only about the Army, but also about myself. Once I received my degree, I immediately enlisted with the New York Army National Guard where I’m now an Infantryman.

While serving in the New York Army National Guard, what’s a typical day like for you?

As a traditional National Guardsman, I’m not typically a full-time soldier. I take part in a monthly drill, where as an Infantryman, the training is oriented around combat readiness and the assurance the soldier is fit to fight. However, during the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, I was notified that my unit would be activated. We were tasked with operating and manning Covid-19 test sites across New York City’s five boroughs and Long Island, New York. I was stationed in Staten Island and on a typical day I assisted law enforcement officers in issuing personal protective equipment to health care workers on the front lines. I also collected Covid-19 test samples to be transported to the laboratory.

Being in the military, what has been your biggest challenge? How have you overcome that challenge?

The biggest challenge for me is maintaining my commitments outside of the military. With the Covid-19 activation and normal drill schedule, it’s been a challenge with
balancing the credit load of graduate school along with the military. I’ve been able to overcome the challenge by improving my time management skills and working with professors when a conflict arrives.

How has the military impacted your life, your future goals, and your career aspirations?

The military helped shape the guiding principles of my life, keeping me focused and determined on completing any task that comes my way. It’s also taught me to recognize what’s truly important in life; and to appreciate the incredible support I receive from my family and friends. Regarding my career goals, it’s reinforced my desire to work in law enforcement. Since I was a kid, I wanted to be a law enforcement officer, just like my dad. My hope is to combine my military experience with my education and become a federal law enforcement officer. Currently, I’m in the selection process to be a Special Agent with the United States Secret Service.

“It’s great that there’s someone like Richard Pusateri at John Jay, who not only understands the struggles military and veteran students face, but also goes above and beyond in assisting them.”—Eric Bardales

As a military student at John Jay, how has the College supported you?

The support I’ve received at John Jay has been amazing. Richard Pusateri, Manager of the Office of Military and Veteran Services, has been really helpful, assisting me during the Covid-19 activation and utilizing my education benefits with the military. It’s great that there’s someone like Richard Pusateri at John Jay, who not only understands the struggles military and veteran students face, but also goes above and beyond in assisting them.

Where do you see yourself in five to 10 years?

I see myself working as a law enforcement officer and using my certificate in Terrorism Studies and what I’ve learned at John Jay to keep this country safe every day.


Return to top

---

Counter Drug Task Force

PAIN MANAGEMENT DOCTOR GOING TO PRISON FOR 70 MONTHS FOR CONSPIRING TO DISTRIBUTE CONTROLLED SUBSTANCES AND HEALTH CARE FRAUD
Dr. Eugene Gosy, 60, of Clarence, NY, who was convicted of conspiracy to distribute controlled substances and healthcare fraud, was sentenced to serve 70 months in prison by Chief U.S. District Judge Frank P. Geraci, Jr.

“The Hippocratic Oath requires physicians to do no harm,” noted U.S. Attorney Kennedy, “and the defendant’s crimes in this case—prescribing drugs outside the reasonable practice of medicine and without a legitimate medical purpose and healthcare fraud—clearly did harm to certain of his patients and to our healthcare system. But this prosecution—and the public debate it sparked—also brought with it an unintended benefit in helping to diagnose and identify some of the underlying conditions and factors which may have contributed not only to defendant’s crimes but to the larger opioid crisis generally. From a healthcare system, which, in 2001, decided to treat pain as a 5th vital sign, thereby incentivizing a surge in opioid prescriptions; to a pharmaceutical industry, which developed and aggressively marketed powerful opioids, all the while minimizing their risks and exaggerating their benefits; to an educational system, which failed appropriately to educate and train healthcare professionals regarding all of the dangers of these powerful drugs and how to deal with patients suffering from addiction; to a medical community, which was too willing to refer its most difficult cases and problematic patients to a single provider who was perhaps too willing to take them; to a criminal justice system, which was slow to recognize that it would be unable simply to arrest its way out of the problem—there is, when it comes to the opioid crisis, plenty of blame to go around. But this prosecution is not about blaming anyone. My Office does not prosecute people; we prosecute violations of federal law. Today’s sentence simply holds one person—Dr. Eugene Gosy—responsible for the criminal violations of federal law he committed. Nothing more. Nothing less.”

“Opioid fraud schemes have devastated many communities around this country. Today’s sentencing demonstrates our commitment to hold accountable individuals whose reckless prescribing pose a danger to the public and contribute to the ongoing opioid epidemic,” said Special Agent-in-Charge Scott J. Lampert, of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Inspector General, Office of Investigations’ New York Region. “In coordination with our law enforcement partners, we will use all available resources to thoroughly investigate crimes involving opioids and other prescription drugs.”

“Our investigation into Dr. Gosy’s role in the illegal proliferation of pain medication at the height of opioid epidemic was vindicated by his guilty plea, earlier this year,” stated DEA Special Agent-in-Charge Ray Donovan. “Today’s sentencing emphasizes law enforcement’s commitment to saving lives by investigating, arresting, and prosecuting those responsible for fueling opioid addiction and overdoses.”
“Gosy’s plea laid bare his criminal indifference to the well-being and health of many of his patients and their families,” said Stephen Belongia, Special Agent-in-Charge of the FBI’s Buffalo Office. Gosy’s practice of medicine placed a higher value on profit through fraud than the fragile lives of those who came to him for help. After his arrest, many expressed support for Gosy believing his treatments were based on good judgment and sincerity, but investigation revealed and his plea prove this was not the case. There is no doubt that Gosy exploited his patients’ pain for profit, at a tragic cost. This case demonstrates the importance of protecting patients suffering from chronic pain from those willing to capitalize on their suffering.”

Assistant U.S. Attorneys Brendan T. Cullinane, Jonathan P. Cantil, and Charles J. Volkert, who handled the case, stated that in carrying out the conspiracy, Dr. Gosy and his employees at the Gosy Center, which included nurse practitioners and physician assistants working under Dr. Gosy’s direction and control, issued more prescriptions for controlled substances annually than any other prescriber or prescribing entity in New York State, including hospitals. Specifically, Dr. Gosy and his employees carried out their conspiracy by:

- prescribing controlled substances without conducting a physical examination and/or after conducting only a limited and inadequate physical examination;
- prescribing controlled substances in ways that were likely to cause, and did cause, dependence and addiction, and that contributed to existing addictions;
- issuing prescriptions for controlled substances in dosages and/or in combinations dangerous to the health and safety of the patient;
- issuing prescriptions for controlled substances despite indications that patients were abusing and misusing the prescribed controlled substances;
- prescribing controlled substances without monitoring or using objective treatment information;
- recommending a course of treatment, including the prescription of controlled substances, which caused patients to become so addicted to opioid drugs that some eventually utilized heroin and other street drugs, in order to satisfy their addiction;
- issuing prescriptions for controlled substances to patients despite knowing that such patients had overdosed, or had otherwise been hospitalized for conditions relating to misuse of controlled substances;
- continuing to prescribe controlled substances in the same manner, and failing to adapt practices to prevent additional deaths and overdoses, despite having notice that treatment they were following had resulted in obvious drug-seeking behavior and addiction; numerous patient overdoses; and patient deaths;
- signing death certificates, in the absence of an autopsy or medical examination, for deceased patients to whom Gosy and/or his employees had prescribed controlled substances despite aberrant behaviors;
- recommending a course of treatment, including the prescribing of controlled substances, which caused the death of at least six individuals, and contributed to the deaths of others;
- utilizing a telephonic patient prescription renewal process, whereby patients could obtain prescriptions for Schedule II, III and IV controlled substances that were prepared by persons who were not medically trained and issued by mid-level providers who had inadequate knowledge about the prescription and the patient, and without adequate review of the prescription and the patient’s chart;
Dr. Gosy pre-signing blank prescriptions and permitting other persons to fill out the remaining information for the prescription, when he would leave the Buffalo area for extended periods;

Dr. Gosy failing properly to review and sign his own patient file notes, and arranging for other, non-medical, personnel to sign said patient file notes, to make it appear as if he had reviewed them;

Dr. Gosy failing properly to review patient file notes/reports prepared by mid-level providers working under his supervision and working in collaboration with him, and arranging for other, non-medical, personnel to sign said patient file notes, to make it appear as if he had reviewed them;

- failing adequately to review records provided to the office from other providers, and failing to obtain a complete patient history and information about present illness and conditions;
- prescribing controlled substances to individuals while failing to refer the patient to and/or ensure compliance with drug addiction treatment despite aberrant behaviors, and requests from patients and/or their family members for help with addiction;
- prescribing methadone to individuals exhibiting aberrant behaviors, outside of a methadone clinic setting, and without employing additional safety precautions or referring the patient to addiction treatment;

Dr. Gosy, beginning in 2008, circumventing state and federal regulations by prescribing buprenorphine for the treatment of narcotics addiction, improperly using his regular DEA number, and sometimes labeling the prescriptions as for “pain management,” even when the drug was being prescribed primarily for the purpose of treating narcotics addiction;

Dr. Gosy issuing prescriptions to patients for buprenorphine, a Schedule III controlled substance, for the treatment of narcotics addiction, without having completed the required medical training course in order to be a “qualifying physician” to treat narcotics addiction;

Dr. Gosy failing to complete training requirements, including Continuing Medical Education courses, Worker’s Compensation training, and Infectious Disease Control training, and instead requiring members of his office staff to take the online courses purporting to be the defendant; and

Dr. Gosy engaging in prescribing patterns whereby high-risk patients that had run out of their prescribed opioids were given buprenorphine until Dr. Gosy could again prescribe other opioids.

Other practices adopted and used in defendant Gosy’s office included the following:

Mid-level providers (Physician Assistants and Nurse Practitioners) were encouraged to maximize volume of patients seen. Providers who saw certain volumes of patients received monetary bonuses, and/or gifts. Providers who saw less patients were
threatened with pay cuts. Providers also earned credit towards bonuses for performing certain, more lucrative procedures on patients.

Beginning in 2012, a “script line” was established which allowed patients seeking prescriptions, who were not scheduled for an office visit, to call and request a prescription. The “script line” was attended to by individuals with no medical training or certification. They were responsible for drafting the requested prescriptions with the proper drug and dosage, checking the patient’s file for “alerts,” and the New York State iStop program, a Prescription Monitoring Program. Each week a mid-level provider was designated to sign all, or almost all, prescriptions requested through the “script line.” This typically amounted to hundreds of prescriptions per day, many of which were for patients whom the practitioner had never seen and/or with whom the practitioner had little or no familiarity.

A system was in place for ordering urine drug tests whereby, once the test was ordered, an employee other than the treating practitioner would typically fill out the request form for the laboratory. As a result, the drug screens often tested for the presence or absence of drugs other than those actually prescribed to the patient. However, as part of the usual course of medical practice, urine drug tests should have been ordered and reviewed in consultation with the patient’s medical file, including history and list of current prescribed medications. This is because urine drug testing provided valuable objective information to assist in diagnostic and therapeutic decision making, provided confirmation of compliance with the treatment plan, and provided indication of overutilization of prescribed drugs, diversion/non-use of prescribed drugs, the use of prescription drugs not prescribed to a particular patient, and/or the use of alcohol or illicit street drugs.

As with the “script line,” toxicology results, including urine drug screens, were reviewed by a mid-level provider, many of whom had never seen the patient and/or with whom the practitioner had little or no familiarity. As a result, tests were often labeled as “consistent,” and not given appropriate attention, even when the tests showed the presence of a non-prescribed drug, or the lack of a prescribed drug.

Patient records often contained incorrect or insufficient information to justify a diagnosis and warrant treatment. Mid-level providers frequently dictated their office notes, failed to review their notes after transcription, and “batch signed” large quantities of notes without review. In addition, Dr. Gosy rarely, if ever, signed his own notes, and arranged for others to affix his signature to office notes and patient files, in order to facilitate more expeditious billing.

The sentencing is the result of an investigation by the Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Inspector General, under the direction of Special Agent-in-Charge Scott Lampert; the Drug Enforcement Administration, under the direction of Ray Donovan, Special Agent-in-Charge, New York Field Division; the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Western New York Health Care Task Force, under the direction of Special Agent-in-Charge Stephen Belongia; the Army National Guard – New York National Guard Counterdrug Task Force, under the direction of Lt. Col. Nicholas Dean; the New York State Department of Financial Services, under the direction of Superintendent Linda A. Lacewell; the New York State Office of the Workers’
NY National Guard continues statewide COVID-19 response

Army.mil, October 20, 2020 ::

LATHAM, N.Y. – More than 1,300 members of the New York National Guard remain on duty for the state’s COVID-19 response, 225 days after initial operations began in New Rochelle in early March.

Since that first effort, members of the Army National Guard, Air National Guard, the New York Naval Militia, New York Guard and agency employees have "rushed to the sound of the guns," Army Maj. Gen. Ray Shields, the adjutant general of New York, said during an Oct. 13 online video panel conducted as part of the Association of the United States Army virtual convention.

"I know it is a common military phrase, but I’ve seen nothing but great volunteerism, patriotism and enthusiasm of our members, the same as the police, fire and other emergency responders" during the statewide response, Shields said.

Boots on the ground peaked in late April with more than 3,600 personnel on duty statewide.

New York National Guard Soldiers and Airmen are now conducting four COVID-19 response missions.

Soldiers and Airmen continue to help staff 15 COVID-19 drive-in test sites across the state from Long Island to Buffalo. As of Oct. 15, members helped administer 661,683 tests at those locations.

New York National Guard personnel are also helping state emergency and department of health personnel conduct logistics operations at seven warehouse facilities across New York.

Another enduring mission is the assembly of COVID-19 test kits – more than 3.8 million so far – for statewide distribution.

On Oct. 17, New York National Guard Soldiers and Airmen began assisting the Department of Health in screening travelers entering New York at state airports.
New York State directs travelers arriving from states with significant community spread to quarantine for 14 days as a precaution. The information assists in potential contact tracing should the need arise.

Balancing pandemic missions with ongoing military missions, training and recruiting provided unique challenges, Shields told the AUSA audience.

While more than 4,500 personnel have performed some pandemic response duties this year, the New York National Guard has deployed 1,000 of its Soldiers and Airmen overseas, he said.

In a remarkable achievement in a time of social distancing, statewide missions and deployments, Shields said New York had exceeded its Army and Air National Guard recruiting and retention goals statewide.

Shields credits much of that to the very public display of Soldiers and Airmen across communities in the state.

"These last few months have been an adventure for every state dealing with COVID-19, and our Soldiers and Airmen of the New York National Guard have done a tremendous job in being flexible and responsive and being there for their fellow citizens for whatever missions come our way," Shields said. "Along with all our leaders, I am especially proud of what our service members have accomplished."

Even as New York has kept its COVID-19 positive test rate at or below 1 percent since Aug. 4, New York Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo continues to recommend vigilance.

"As we go through the fall and into the winter and cases continue to rise across the country, it's going to take the work of all New Yorkers to maintain our progress," Cuomo said Oct. 16. "We cannot and will not risk going backwards to where we were in the spring."


National Guard troops appear at Rochester, Syracuse airports to enforce quarantine mandates from NYS

Finger Lakes1. com, October 20, 2020 :

This week the New York State Army and Air National Guard began assisting with registering travelers as they flew into the Greater Rochester International Airport.
The change comes as states around New York begin to see upticks in COVID-19 cases. The concern, among state officials, is that visitors from these states may not always be registering for their required 14-day quarantine.

One local resident, Kristen Milner from Sodus, is worried about Pennsylvania being put on that list. Her parents live across the state border in North Orwell.

“If they put Pennsylvania on that list, I’m not going to see them for Thanksgiving, or Christmas or my children’s birthdays,” she told News10NBC. “It’s just going to be phone calls again. It’s really heart wrenching.”

Other travelers noted that they were taken aback by the presence of National Guard troops. “I was not sure why the troops were involved,” Nova Antoine added to News10NBC as he came from Houston. He already planned on quarantining.

“I’m used to seeing the New York State health department but seeing the National Guard, I was kind of distressed ‘Why do we have National Guard in the airport?’ You know?”

Troops have been spotted at both Rochester and Syracuse airports.


New York National Guard members assisting with travel advisory screenings at upstate airports

WROC, October 20, 2020 :

ROCHESTER, N.Y. (WROC) — The New York National Guard is working with respective county health departments across the state to assist with travel advisory screenings.

Officials say this effort is in addition to the 1,300 NYNG members currently assisting in various COVID-19 response efforts around New York, including 15-staffed testing centers, assembling COVID-19 kits for the New York State Department of Health, and assisting in medical supply logistics operations.

Officials say the soldiers and airmen are in uniform, and are not carrying weapons. The airport screenings began Monday throughout Upstate New York.

The coronavirus travel advisory, which requires incoming travelers from high infection rates to quarantine for 14 days, was updated Tuesday. There are now 43 states and territories impacted by the advisory, including three of New York’s neighboring states.
The travel advisory quarantine applies to any person that arrives from a state with a positive test rate higher than 10 per 100,000 residents over a seven-day rolling average or a state with a 10% or higher positivity rate over a seven-day rolling average.

People caught violating the advisory risk civil penalties ranging from $2,000 to $10,000, Gov. Cuomo said earlier this year.

There are exceptions to the quarantine travel advisory rules: Essential workers are exempt and stays of less than 24 hours in an area wouldn’t constitute enforcement.

For more information on the travel advisory, visit this New York state website.


Cuomo Administration Insists NY Is Too Broke To Help Fund The "Most Critical" Election Of Our Lives

Gothamist, October 20, 2020 ::

While the pandemic continues to threaten the safety and livelihoods of New Yorkers, as many as 5 million people may choose to vote absentee in the 2020 presidential election—up from less than the 500,000 absentee ballots mailed out in 2016. "To say this election is the most critical in recent history is understating its importance," Governor Andrew Cuomo said last month, after he ordered every Board of Elections in the state to come up with a plan to ensure that absentee ballots are counted. "We want to make sure every vote in New York is counted and every voice is heard."

Yet Cuomo, who has extraordinary power over the state's budget and who recently made it easier for New Yorkers to vote absentee, has refused to allocate money that election workers say is necessary to meet the staggering logistical challenges posed by the 2020 election. While the State Board of Elections has estimated that it needs $50 million to distribute to localities to ensure that all votes are counted accurately and in a timely fashion, the governor has insisted that the state is too broke to help.

Instead, the Cuomo administration reportedly told state election commissioners that they should tell the local boards to apply for funds through Facebook’s charitable foundation, the Center for Tech and Civic Life.

"Unless the advocates want to lend us their money tree, in the absence of federal funding, there isn't any," said Freeman Klopot, a spokesperson for the New York State Division of the Budget. "The biggest expense is manpower and the state has offered every board of election in the state National Guard members to augment their election efforts."
Klopott declined to explain how deploying National Guard members to manually count absentee ballots would work.

Good government groups say that the June 23rd primary offers a preview of what could happen if the election infrastructure isn't bolstered. In that election, more than 778,000 absentee ballots were distributed in New York City alone; thousands were discounted from postmark issues, lawsuits were filed, and the votes took weeks to count.

The primary was funded with $20 million in federal stimulus funds and $4 million from the state.

Jennifer Wilson, deputy director for the League of Women Voters of New York, told Gothamist that county BOEs will be hit with an unmanageable deluge of absentee ballots required to be fed through paper ballot voting machines.

"You could have multiple machines and multiple people [inserting ballots], but you still need to have to review the ballots ahead of time. So, they're like reviewing them on the rolling basis, double-checking people didn't vote in person, invalidating the ballots of people who did vote in person," said Wilson. "It's a lot of very small checking, and then double-checking, and then we gotta check again. And then if there is a problem with the signature, now we have to reach out to the voter and give them due notice and let them be able to address that issue. It's just a lot."

The challenge of counting the ballots is compounded by the relatively short time that BOEs have to count them: four weeks, beginning on November 10th. As in all presidential elections, local BOEs must adhere to federal mandates that ensure every vote is counted and certified by State Board of Canvassers by December 7th, a week before electors are chosen for the Electoral College.

More workers will also be needed to cure ballots, reducing the ballot invalidation rate. With in-person voters waiting on long lines to prevent crowding inside polling sites, there is a need to both create more sites provide proper PPE.

The League of Women Voters joined Citizens Union, the New York Public Interest Research Group, Common Cause, and Reinvent Albany sent a letter to Cuomo last month urging him to consider funding the election.

“Something is seriously wrong with New York State’s democracy when…local boards of election are so broke they are pleading for funding from a charity,” read the group’s letter, referencing Facebook’s foundation. “Our organizations are acutely aware that New York has a series of brutal budget choices ahead, but funding the state’s democracy and supporting the safety and security of its elections must be prioritized ahead of the most consequential election in recent history.”

Betsy Gotbaum, the executive director of Citizens Union, said, “You know they could find $50 million. They could and I don't understand why they don't.”

Wilson, of the League of Women Voters, said the lack of state funding will have "a real impact" on the mechanics of the election.
“Upstate [New York], there'll be a mess because there won't be as many people working, there won't be as many poll sites open, there won't be as many people counting ballots on the back end," Wilson said. "I hope we don't see high level of absentee voting error. But yeah, if they're understaffed, and they're rushing to get the counts in time, I could definitely see there being voters who don't have their ballot counted."


Small group protests report of pending New York Army National Guard to airports

WGRZ, October 19, 2020 ::
Oct 23, 2020

CHEEKTOWAGA, N.Y. — A small group gathered outside of the Buffalo Niagara International Airport Monday morning to express their opposition to pending New York Army National Guard deployments to airports across New York State. The move is being considered to enforce mandatory travel quarantines.

Civil rights advocates, along with The Financial Guys Partner Michael Lomas, 2ANYS Founder Steve Felano, LibertyMovement.Org CEO James Ostrowski and Erie County Libertarian Party Chair Duane Whitmer were on hand for the protest.

The group called for Monday's action following a report that the Governor Andrew Cuomo was going to send in the New York Army National Guard to airports across the state.

Every Tuesday changes are made to the state's Travel Advisory list. Based on 2 On Your Side's review of the publicly available data, five states meet the criteria this week to be added to New York's Travel Advisory list including several border states.

Those five states are: Arizona, Connecticut, Maryland, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. This is a projection based on these states meeting the criteria given by New York State.

Official word will be coming from the state on Tuesday, October 20.


Return to top
New York efforts to keep out COVID gets more muscle but also more complications

WHEC, October 19, 2020:

ROCHESTER, N.Y. (WHEC) — New York’s push to keep coronavirus out got more muscle Monday, but also became more complicated as neighboring states faced rising COVID numbers.

On Monday, New York State Army and Air National Guard troops started helping make sure travelers registered as they flew into Greater Rochester International Airport from possible virus hot spots, from which travelers are required to quarantine for two weeks after they enter New York.

The prospect of quarantines worries Kristen Milner of Sodus, whose parents live just over the state line in North Orwell, Pennsylvania.

“If they put Pennsylvania on that list, I’m not going to see them for Thanksgiving, or Christmas or my children’s birthdays,” she says. “It’s just going to be phone calls again. It’s really heart wrenching.”

New York efforts to keep out COVID gets more muscle but also more complications

Already, the state is putting a stronger face on its efforts to monitor air travelers by adding National Guard troops to health department checkpoints at airports like Rochester’s.

“I was not sure why the troops were involved,” said a startled Nova Antoine as he came into Rochester from COVID hot spot Houston, already planning to quarantine himself.

“I was a little taken aback by that,” he says.

“I’m used to seeing the New York State health department but seeing the National Guard, I was kind of distressed ‘Why do we have National Guard in the airport?’ You know?”

Frequent business traveler Oscar Rizzo saluted the Guard as he arrived from Orlando.

“I totally agree that they should be here,” he said. “I think it’s a good idea. Because it shows respect in the sense of authority.”

Kristen Milner says she hopes the state doesn’t go full crackdown on nearby states and admits her parents were already nervous about running afoul of one.
“They’re afraid because they have Pennsylvania license plates,” she says. “There are police stations at some areas, and stops that pull you over, and you get tested, and you have to quarantine.”

Meanwhile, Governor Cuomo acknowledged that even though New Jersey and Connecticut are seeing rising COVID numbers, it may be close to impossible to quarantine people who routinely cross between New York and its closest neighbors.

“It is complicated and we’re working with them but we don’t have any final conclusion yet but for all practical matters you can’t do border control”


NY National Guard continues statewide COVID-19 response

National Guard.mil, By Col. Richard Goldenberg | New York National Guard | Oct. 19, 2020::

LATHAM, N.Y. – More than 1,300 members of the New York National Guard remain on duty for the state’s COVID-19 response, 225 days after initial operations began in New Rochelle in early March.

Since that first effort, members of the Army National Guard, Air National Guard, the New York Naval Militia, New York Guard and agency employees have “rushed to the sound of the guns,” Army Maj. Gen. Ray Shields, the adjutant general of New York, said during an Oct. 13 online video panel conducted as part of the Association of the United States Army virtual convention.

“I know it is a common military phrase, but I’ve seen nothing but great volunteerism, patriotism and enthusiasm of our members, the same as the police, fire and other emergency responders” during the statewide response, Shields said.

Boots on the ground peaked in late April with more than 3,600 personnel on duty statewide.

New York National Guard Soldiers and Airmen are now conducting four COVID-19 response missions.

Soldiers and Airmen continue to help staff 15 COVID-19 drive-in test sites across the state from Long Island to Buffalo. As of Oct. 15, members helped administer 661,683 tests at those locations.
New York National Guard personnel are also helping state emergency and department of health personnel conduct logistics operations at seven warehouse facilities across New York.

Another enduring mission is the assembly of COVID-19 test kits – more than 3.8 million so far – for statewide distribution.

On Oct. 17, New York National Guard Soldiers and Airmen began assisting the Department of Health in screening travelers entering New York at state airports.

New York State directs travelers arriving from states with significant community spread to quarantine for 14 days as a precaution. The information assists in potential contact tracing should the need arise.

Balancing pandemic missions with ongoing military missions, training and recruiting provided unique challenges, Shields told the AUSA audience.

While more than 4,500 personnel have performed some pandemic response duties this year, the New York National Guard has deployed 1,000 of its Soldiers and Airmen overseas, he said.

In a remarkable achievement in a time of social distancing, statewide missions and deployments, Shields said New York had exceeded its Army and Air National Guard recruiting and retention goals statewide.

Shields credits much of that to the very public display of Soldiers and Airmen across communities in the state.

"These last few months have been an adventure for every state dealing with COVID-19, and our Soldiers and Airmen of the New York National Guard have done a tremendous job in being flexible and responsive and being there for their fellow citizens for whatever missions come our way," Shields said. "Along with all our leaders, I am especially proud of what our service members have accomplished."

Even as New York has kept its COVID-19 positive test rate at or below 1 percent since Aug. 4, New York Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo continues to recommend vigilance.

"As we go through the fall and into the winter and cases continue to rise across the country, it's going to take the work of all New Yorkers to maintain our progress," Cuomo said Oct. 16. "We cannot and will not risk going backwards to where we were in the spring."


Return to top
How New York’s mis-steps let Covid-19 overwhelm the US: City leaders saw the threat but did not act: why arguments and rivalries among politicians and power groups allowed disaster to unfold

Financial times, October 22, 2020:

This story is part of a major Financial Times series Coronavirus: could the world have been spared? Investigating the global response to the crisis and whether the disaster could have been averted.

THE FIRST EVENT

A deadly quiet

An empty street in New Rochelle after the commuter hub was locked down in March. Within days of the lockdown, businesses and school were shuttering across the US © Angus Mordant/Bloomberg

New Rochelle’s mayor watched as the National Guard rolled into the commuter hub north of New York City, wearing camouflage that offered no disguise in suburbia. A week after a local lawyer had been diagnosed with coronavirus, a mile-wide containment zone was being drawn around the virus’s first known superspreader event on the US’s east coast.

After a sleepless night, Mayor Noam Bramson called his city manager to spill out his worries. On March 10, he thought New Rochelle’s lockdown looked “dramatic”. But within days businesses and schools were shuttering, and a deadly quiet was descending across the US.

“I went through a series of worst-case scenarios. What will we do if there are food riots? If civil unrest sweeps through the essential workforce?” says the 50-year-old mayor.

But in the world’s financial capital, just eight miles away, business bustled on. The New Rochelle lawyer, seen as “patient zero” for “community spread” because he had not visited any coronavirus hotspots, had commuted to the city.

New Rochelle mayor Noam Bramson outside City Hall last week. He says of coronavirus: ‘We thought we were dealing with a kitchen fire and could knock it down with a hand extinguisher. But in reality it was through the walls and ducts’ © Monique Jaques/FT

Yet nothing in New York City was locked down. New Yorkers who were not sick or vulnerable “should be going about your life”, said Mayor Bill de Blasio on March 11, as the city’s largest conference venue boasted about a “buzzing” coffee trade show. Within 17 days, the Javits Center would become a field hospital.
“We thought we were dealing with a kitchen fire and could knock it down with a hand extinguisher. But in reality it was through the walls and ducts... it was everywhere. There were already 10,000 cases of Covid in NYC,” says Mr Bramson.

WARNING SIGNALS

Early overconfidence

Times Square in New York, in March. Epidemiologists believe coronavirus did not gain steam until it entered New York from Europe in mid-February, when it spread fast through the tightly-packed city and across the US © Mark Kauzlarich/Bloomberg

The US had seen coronavirus coming as it swept from China through Asia, Europe and Iran in early 2020. “We’re prepared and we’re doing a great job with it, and it will go away,” said Donald Trump, US president, on March 10. A week earlier, New York governor Andrew Cuomo declared: “Excuse our arrogance as New Yorkers... [but] we don’t even think it’s going to be as bad as it was in other countries.”

As the National Guard responded to New Rochelle’s 108 recorded cases, Mr Cuomo observed reassuringly that New York City had just 36 and no deaths. But since then it has suffered more than 260,000 infections and buried 24,000 of its citizens, almost 10 times the number who died at the World Trade Center in 2001.

The virus was first spotted in the US in late January, in a man who had flown to Washington state from Wuhan, the Chinese city where it was discovered. Small outbreaks dotted the West Coast, but epidemiologists believe coronavirus did not gain steam until it entered New York from Europe in mid-February. It spread fast through the tightly-packed city and across the country.

Mr Cuomo has been hailed for how he fought the ensuing fire, calmly informing the public and marshalling resources. His new book contrasts his crisis management skills with an incompetent national response. But a closer examination of those crucial early weeks tells a less flattering story, of divisions between New York and Washington; the governor and the mayor; the mayor and his health department; and the city’s richest and poorest hospitals.

Many of those divisions persist, raising questions about how many lessons have been learnt from New York’s fraught spring as it enters the winter with cases climbing once more.

To Gustavo Rivera, who leads the state’s health committee, New York City should have been locking down when the guardsmen reached New Rochelle, “but there was two weeks in which we did not do that.

“The notion that we should be celebrating when we still have more deaths than in most countries in the world is just insanity,” he says.

Our understanding of coronavirus has improved since March, but interviews with dozens of the people at the centre of New York’s response show that its leaders were warned of the threat and could have acted faster.
Dan Lucey is an epidemic chaser. Every year since the 1980s he has travelled to where a disease is spreading fast: HIV, West Nile, Sars, Ebola, Yellow Fever. At 10pm on December 30, the Georgetown University scholar got the news flash about a new disease that would be named Covid-19.

On January 23, he gave a chillingly prescient PowerPoint presentation to New York City's public hospitals, warning that healthcare workers risked being infected if personal protective equipment ran short, explaining the threat of superspreader events and showing how masks helped Hong Kong to contain Sars.

Mr Lucey was no alarmist, but by February 6 he was desperate to make people listen. Speaking at Washington's National Academy of Sciences, he unfurled two seven-foot posters, printed at a local FedEx. One showed a map of high-speed rail connections spewing out of Wuhan, representing how fast coronavirus could spread. The second was Rembrandt's painting of “Belshazzar's Feast”, showing the king celebrating a victory while the writing on the wall behind him reads that his days are numbered.

Mr Lucey now thinks he should have gone further: “I should have brought a drum and stood on top of the table and dressed in some bizarre clothes or something and said, ‘the pandemic is coming!’”

In February, New York's then public health commissioner had said coronavirus was 'not something that you're going to contract in the subway or on the bus' © Mark Kauzlarich/Bloomberg

But New York's leaders were trying to quell fears, not rouse them. “This is not something that you're going to contract in the subway or on the bus,” Oxiris Barbot, the then public health commissioner, told the press on February 2. It is true, as she now emphasises, that scientists did not yet understand asymptomatic spread, but there was enough uncertainty to make this proclamation too confident.

Scares over previous epidemics hitting New York had proved unfounded, and the mayor and governor were treating the disease like Ebola — preparing for isolated cases, not a rampant outbreak. But Michael Osterholm, a University of Minnesota epidemiology professor, believes the public health community “lost six weeks” because they saw coronavirus as less of a threat than a flu pandemic. It was “more than a fog”, he says. “It was like Jell-O.”

‘Upper East Side hospitals could get anything; in Queen’s people wore garbage bags instead of gowns’

Non-profit hospitals, which often rely on government aid, could not afford to stock up on personal protective equipment just in case © Angus Mordant/Bloomberg

New York’s wealthy private hospitals had seen the writing on the wall, taking out loans and using board members’ connections to grab supplies. Mount Sinai started discussing Covid-19 on January 7 while Northwell Health, New York's largest private employer, was stocking up on personal protective equipment from January and securing extra staff by February.
But the city’s healthcare system is divided. Non-profit hospitals, which often rely on
government aid, could not afford to stock up just in case. At Downstate Medical
Center, which serves a poorer Brooklyn community, the staff union had to help find
PPE, according to Fred Kowal, the union’s president.

“In the Upper East Side of Manhattan hospitals you could get full access to anything,
but in Queens and Brooklyn we had people wearing garbage bags because they
couldn’t get surgical gowns,” he says.

“The rich fancy hospitals were getting tonnes of donations,” notes Amy Plasencia, an
emergency medicine resident and union representative at the nearby Brookdale
medical centre. “We needed donations and didn’t get them.”

Hospitalisations rose alarmingly. When the public health department first reported
cumulative figures on March 24, 15,000 patients had been admitted for Covid-19. A
week later, the total was 41,000. The week after that, 74,000. The failure to slow
Covid-19’s progress strained hospitals, making it more deadly. A JAMA Internal
Medicine study found that US survival rates were up to three times worse in hospitals
with under 50 intensive care beds.

And poorer communities, often of colour, were hit hardest. In the Bronx, 634 Covid-19
patients were hospitalised per 100,000 of population, compared with 331 in
Manhattan, where beds lay empty as richer residents fled to second homes.

Andrew Cuomo, New York governor, ultimately ordered a sharp increase in the
number of beds and brought the public and private systems’ heads together so
overflowing poorer hospitals could transfer patients to hospitals with spare beds. But it
was a wobbly start.

Mr Cuomo secured a US Navy hospital ship, which sailed up the Hudson River on
March 30, but what New York really needed from the federal government was reliable
testing.

Local leaders were pushing Washington’s Centers for Disease Control and
Prevention for permission to do their own tests from late January, but did not get it
until February 29, forcing them to make decisions with little data.

For more than a month, New York could only test people who had visited hotspots,
and had to send every sample to the CDC whose first tests failed. Once it began its
own testing, the state only had capacity to run 200 tests a day. That “fiasco” blinded
the city “to how much virus was already in the community”, says Syra Madad, a New
York epidemiologist.

The agency would not let even world-class New York labs like Northwell run their own
tests. This, combined with Mr Trump’s dismissive tone, meant Washington was “not a
player”, says Michael Dowling, Northwell’s chief executive: New York was left to fend
for itself.

New York secured a US Navy hospital ship, but what it really needed from the federal
government was reliable testing © Mark Kauzlarich/Bloomberg
“We had our hands tied behind our back,” recalls Melissa DeRosa, Mr Cuomo’s closest aide, as federal authorities tested people arriving from Asia and Iran but kept flights open from Europe, where cases were rising. More than 1.7m people flew in from Europe in “the lost month” of February, she says, while “Covid-19 was silently ravaging the entire north-east”.

The day after getting permission to test, New York found its first confirmed case. Ms DeRosa says: “It was like, ‘Boom!’ Imagine what would have happened if New York had the ability to do our own testing earlier.”

Unable to catch the virus early, New York’s leaders would instead have to manage an explosion using the bluntest tool available: a lockdown.

It was a prospect that split New York’s businesses. Big global employers that had experienced Covid-19 elsewhere began grounding staff and closing offices in early March, says Kathryn Wylde, who runs the influential business lobby Partnership for New York City. But tourism and trade show groups issued three open letters between March 2 and 10, warning that restricting travel “threatens to harm the US economy”.

There was tension, too, with smaller businesses that remained “in denial” and were urging officials to go slower, says Ms Wylde. And Mr de Blasio had little sympathy for big business. He had pitched himself as a mayor for the little guy, after 12 years of the city being run by the billionaire Mike Bloomberg.

Mr Cuomo favoured gradual restrictions, but events were moving fast. On March 12, a member of the Broadway musical Moulin Rouge developed a fever, prompting the show’s producers to cancel that day’s shows. A fin de siècle drama about a consumptive courtesan had been silenced by a new disease, and within hours Mr Cuomo had closed every Broadway theatre.

**The cavalry ain’t coming**

That Thursday, when Wall Street suffered its worst fall since 1987, “the world was turning upside down in New York”, says Charlotte St Martin, Broadway League president.

By the weekend Ms DeRosa remembered feeling that somebody from Washington with pandemic expertise should have been telling New York what to do, “and they didn’t. The cavalry ain’t coming”.

On March 16, Mr Cuomo ordered restaurants and gyms to shut, although not before Mr de Blasio did one last workout, “undermining the governor” in Ms DeRosa’s view. But the virus was more rife than they realised, and some were already arguing that a faster, fuller lockdown was needed to avert a human and economic disaster.

**DIVISION AND ANIMOSITY**

Inside the health department
Inside the health department’s art deco headquarters, there had been calls for a lockdown since late February, insiders say. “We knew at that point we were in big trouble,” says one, who did not want to be named for fear of retaliation.

But years of division between Mr de Blasio and the department made it hard to get his ear. Now, the mayor preferred to listen to Mitch Katz, who runs the public hospital system but is not an infectious disease expert. In a March 10 memo, Mr Katz told the mayor there was “no proof” that locking down would work, and advocated a herd immunity strategy instead. One person involved in the city’s response said Mr Katz had been asked to provide a counterargument to shutting down large events but that no big events happened after this email.

This animosity was exacerbated by a mis-step by Dr Barbot. Emma Wolfe, Mr De Blasio’s chief of staff, got a message from the then health commissioner on March 6, telling her that the city should lock down.

Ms Wolfe summoned department heads to a Brooklyn emergency management centre used for responding to hurricanes and terror attacks, but once Dr Barbot arrived she had changed her tune, say people familiar with the matter. One person involved in the city’s response says she was still advocating gradual measures to forestall a complete lockdown by March 17. The incident damaged her credibility, a former city official said: “She’s now the boy who cried wolf.”

Dr Barbot denies changing her mind but confirms that her lockdown discussions with City Hall began around then, and “day after day the tone of those became increasingly more heated”. In August, she resigned, complaining that responsibility for contact tracing had been handed to Mr Katz’s department.

“I felt deeply disappointed that the expertise of the health department wasn’t fully leveraged,” she says. The department insider put it more starkly, saying it was “muzzled and gagged”.

While New York’s mayor and governor deliberated, a disparate group outside the official channels was pushing them to take more aggressive action.

James Krellenstein, co-founder of Prep4All, a campaign for preventive HIV medicines, had been warning officials of the lack of testing since February. Fearing that Mr de Blasio was ignoring his experts, he organised a March 9 letter urging the mayor to lock down.

That day, Steve Levin, a council member for Brooklyn, texted everyone he knew in City Hall and the governor’s office, saying a lockdown was needed within 48 hours. Reading epidemiological models online, he says: “I did the math and had an ‘Oh shit’ moment.”

If New York followed Italy’s experience, 10,000 New Yorkers would die by mid-April.

The failure of official channels led to unlikely alliances. Corey Johnson, the speaker of the council, started calling others who could help him “ring the alarm”. Rob Bennett,
the mayor’s former social media director, was shaken to hear from him. If the speaker was not getting through to those in power, he remembers thinking, “we are fucked”.

Late on March 13, Mr Johnson and Mr Levin held a call with Demetre Daskalakis, deputy public health commissioner, and Michael Donnelly, a tech data analyst who had published dire forecasts online.

Mr Donnelly says Mr Daskalakis was considering resigning on CNN after advising a lockdown only for the mayor’s office to respond that his models were inconclusive. Mr Daskalakis did not respond to a request for comment.

Mr Donnelly, who had worked at the Federal Reserve board with people who regretted not having issued louder warnings before the financial crisis, joined a “Covid Flatteners” Slack group and a Twitter thread trying to mobilise concerned techies and celebrities. Now he reflects: “I don’t think it’s a great way to run a country, city or state that counts on some nerdy data scientist with a laptop in Hell’s Kitchen.”

THE WHEELS COME OFF THE BUS

Battle over schools

Meanwhile, a debate over closing schools was consuming City Hall. Mr De Blasio resisted the idea in part because he feared the impact on poorer parents with no childcare. “They’re the ones who can’t afford to go out to their house in the Hamptons,” explains one person who worked for him.

Private schools were closing by March 10 and a reluctant teachers’ union called three days later for public schools to follow. But it took five days, in which the governor intervened, for the mayor to agree.

“In retrospect,” says Dr Barbot, “I think we all wish we had closed the schools more rapidly.”

Emergency powers granted to Mr Cuomo meant the city needed his blessing to close businesses or schools, but City Hall was aghast to see him announce the closures, just before Mr de Blasio had planned to.

“The public was angry that the mayor had dragged his feet on schools for so long,” says Peter Ajemian, Mr Cuomo’s communications director. “We were concerned about the public, not the feelings of any one politician.”

“We were focused on the kids — not who could hold a press conference first,” counters Avery Cohen, Mr de Blasio’s deputy press secretary.

The always frosty relationship between the two men deteriorated. “The wheels started to come a little off the bus with the schools decision,” says the former city official, but “shelter-in-place is where it broke down”.
On March 17, Mr de Blasio declared that New York may need a “shelter-in-place” order. Activists were relieved, with one person who lobbied for a lockdown saying he thought this would be a turning point: “It did not occur to us honestly, naively, that the mayor [floating] a closure would then be used by the governor as a reason not to close. It blew our mind.”

Within hours a blindsided Mr Cuomo was telling the press that he had no intention of quarantining any city. He feared that a sudden lockdown would cause “panic on the streets”, says Wafaa El-Sadr, of Columbia University’s public health department. And having warned of the “massive disruption” of a closure, he was infuriated that the mayor seemed to be proposing exactly that, with no plan.

Days were wasted because [the governor] was afraid of the term shelter-in-place

Jumaane Williams, New York City’s public advocate

The state was following the data and trying to acclimatise the public, Ms DeRosa says: “The mayor had been so inconsistent and so slow to respond to the crisis . . . that he had no credibility with the press or the public. All his rhetoric did . . . was lead to confusion and misinformation.”

Ms Cohen rejects the “tough guy insults”, saying the mayor had been the first to call for closures, but “with each announcement, the city faced resistance from the state”.

Mr Cuomo ultimately announced on March 20 that he would put New York “on pause” 48 hours later, choosing his own phrasing rather than a terminology with echoes of 1970s nuclear scares. But to his critics, he wasted precious time asserting his authority.

“The mayor and the governor were in a constant pissing contest. The people in the middle get urinated on,” says Mr Rivera, the state senator.

Mr Ajemian says the public advocate is “peddling misinformation” and Mr Cuomo’s “decisive action” saved lives, but one Columbia University study came to a similar conclusion, calculating that almost 19,000 lives could have been saved between March 15 and May 3 had the same actions been taken a week earlier, which works out to almost 16 lives an hour.

New York’s attorney-general Letitia James is famous for her fights against slumlords and President Trump. But worried about delays to locking down, she played peacemaker, bridging the gap between mayor and governor in private.

On March 19, she organised a call with religious, civic and business representatives to build support for a lockdown. Several participants said that two business leaders — Ms Wylde and Bill Rudin, chair of the Real Estate Board of New York — sounded unconvinced.

“They were like, ‘Well, no, we can’t move so quickly, this is going to destroy business’,” remembers one.
That is not Ms Wylde’s recollection. She and Mr Rudin had been told in confidence that Mr Cuomo would announce the “pause” the next day, she says, so wanted to discourage “hysteria” while defending his need to balance health and economic interests. Still, her group published a survey on March 20 saying that a lockdown was among its members’ top fears.

Property executives have donated heavily to Mr Cuomo and some were quietly lobbying him, says one person who spoke to several of them at the time: “They were saying, ‘If you shut down New York, it will never reopen’. We were saying, ‘If we shut down right now it will be an easier and better path to reopening’.”

But Mr Cuomo’s team says he was listening to experts rather than lobbyists, and Mr Rudin told the call that occupancy in his company’s offices had plunged to just 6 per cent, showing how many employers had already shut.

The day after the call, Mr Cuomo announced the “pause”. The governor had feared the impact of even a two-week lockdown: it ended up lasting almost two and a half months.

New York avoided neither a public health crisis nor an economic crisis, but polls suggest Mr Cuomo’s popularity is at its highest since he took office in 2011. He has recast himself as a decisive leader, whose “#NYTough” sloganeering has prevailed over critiques of how he handled the lockdown. The only criticism that has stuck is over his directive that elderly Covid-19 patients should be readmitted to nursing homes, as such facilities recorded more than a quarter of New York’s deaths from the disease.

For Mr Williams, the public advocate, though: “It is very hard to watch the governor selling books when tens of thousands of lives were lost.”

LESSONS TO BE LEARNT

The consequences of inaction

While leaders prevaricated, New Yorkers were harbouring infections that would soon hospitalise them. Amy Plasencia, the Brooklyn-based emergency medicine resident, says they were unprepared for the “sheer speed” of patients hitting their wards. “In those early days before the city shut down, everything was still open, but we still had hundreds of patients,” she says, recalling her colleagues asking: “Why are we not shutting down? Why is the entire country not shutting down?”

The time it took to answer that question cost lives, thousands of them, according to the Columbia academics’ calculations.

And while those who remained in the city, often essential workers in overcrowded poor and minority communities, were hit worst, many left, spreading the virus across the country.

Genetic research has found that most US Covid-19 infections have been of the European strain that landed in New York, not the Chinese strain of the first west coast
cases. David Engelthaler, a genomic epidemiologist at Arizona’s Translational Genomics Research Institute, says that earlier detection could have limited the spread. Instead, the city circulated it like “Grand Central station”.

In other words, the virus radiated out of New York, just as Mr Lucey warned it had from Wuhan. And by restricting testing, the Trump administration missed the chance to save not just a city with few Trump voters like New York, but to stop the virus in its tracks before it hit red states and swing states too.

Scott Stringer, who as New York City’s comptroller is akin to its chief financial officer, is now investigating the key decisions in its lockdown debate. “The way you do a better job next time is by learning what went wrong this time,” he says.

New York’s public advocate has reached his own conclusion. “We insisted on relearning lessons others had learnt,” says Mr Williams. “Our lack of action probably harmed the entire country.”

One stark statistic supports his verdict: the US, with just 4 per cent of the world’s population, has suffered more than a fifth of the world’s deaths from Covid-19.

How has the pandemic been handled where you live? What has gone right or wrong for you during this time? Do you work in a sector that was hit hard by lockdowns? Or have you managed to adapt your life positively? Share your experiences in the comments below.

https://www.ft.com/content/a52198f6-0d20-4607-b12a-05110bc48723

New York National Guard deployed to airports to help enforce mandatory travel quarantines

WKBW, October 16, 2020:

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) — The New York National Guard is being deployed to airports across the state to assist the state health department in the travel advisory screening process, 7 Eyewitness News has learned.

A total of 36 states and two U.S. territories are currently on the advisory list, meaning anyone arriving at a New York airport from one of those areas must quarantine for 14 days or face possible fines. Essential workers are excluded.

The initiative will vary from airport to airport and is being phased in starting today, a representative from the New York National Guard said. Guard members were seen working in this capacity at the Buffalo Niagara International Airport on Friday.
There is no word on when members of the guard will arrive at the Buffalo airport. They will be in uniform but will not be armed.

The goal is to free up health department employees for other duties while members of the guard collect information from travelers.

The following is a statement from the Office of Public Affairs for the New York National Guard:

"The New York National Guard will be working with the Department of Health in an administrative capacity to assist with travel advisory screenings at airports across the state. This is in addition to the missions New York National Guard members are currently conducting in support of New York's COVID-19 response. These include staffing 15 testing centers across the state, assembling COVID-19 test kits for the Department of Health, and assisting in medical supply logistics operations.

The Soldiers and Airmen will be in uniform. They will not be carrying weapons. The mission will begin next week. We have not yet determined troops to task numbers yet."

The move is generating a variety of responses; some feel the soldiers presence will intimidate air travelers, others think it is a good idea to keep people safe, while others think it will reinforce the seriousness of the pandemic to those who are not taking it seriously.

When 7 Eyewitness News posted a picture of a soldier in-training at the Buffalo Niagara International Airport, many questioned why Governor Andrew Cuomo was using the National Guard in the airports when he did not use them during the violent protests this past year.

The Republic Minority Leader of the NYS Senate, Robert Ortt, is also not happy with the move by the Governor to use uniformed service members for travel screening.

“I strongly disagree with the Governor’s decision to activate the National Guard for use in his airport tracking program. While we must be diligent about protecting our communities from the threat of COVID-19, the use of uniformed service members at our airports goes too far. As a former member of the New York National Guard, I do not believe that these outstanding men and women should be used as political tools or deployed to enforce politically driven policies,” said NYS Senator Ortt in a statement to 7 Eyewitness News.

Here is a list of states/territories currently on the advisory list:

Alaska

Alabama

Arkansas
Colorado
Delaware
Florida
Georgia
Guam
Iowa
Idaho
Illinois
Indiana
Kansas
Kentucky
Louisiana
Michigan
Minnesota
Missouri
Mississippi
Montana
North Carolina
North Dakota
Nebraska
New Mexico
Nevada
Ohio
Oklahoma
Gov. Cuomo Unveils Initial Framework For New York’s Delivery Of COVID-19 Vaccine To Residents

CBS2, October 18, 2020:

NEW YORK (CBSNewYork) — Gov. Andrew Cuomo predicts 40 million doses of a coronavirus vaccine are what the state will need, as he announced Sunday a preliminary plan for distributing one.

It is being called the Vaccination Administration Process, or “VAP” for short, CBS2’s Dave Carlin reported.

“This is a massive undertaking. This is a larger operational undertaking than anything I would argue than we have done during COVID to date,” Cuomo said.

The governor presented New York state’s Initial framework for delivering a coronavirus vaccine. He estimated 20 million residents will need one shot, then a booster about two weeks later.
It would begin with health care workers at at-risk nursing home residents, followed by first responders and teachers, those over 65, and then healthy adults and children.

Carlin asked New Yorkers if they would line up right away.

“If scientists say and doctors say it’s good and it’s safe, why not?” said Mike Khmia of Chelsea.

“Probably not day one,” another man said. “There are side effects that we may not know, so let’s take some time.”

“There’s going to be conspiracy theories and there are going to be rumors,” Cuomo said.

Getting enough of the public on board is not the only challenge. The governor and leaders of other states say the federal government, which oversees the COVID-19 vaccine effort, must provide clarity and carve up responsibilities so states can plan ahead.

“States cannot do this on their own,” Cuomo said.

The governor said after getting the millions of doses necessary for the state it may become necessary to keep all that vaccine in a centralized place with specialized equipment to keep it cold, Carlin reported.

“The storage of the vaccine would have to be at minus-80 degrees. There’s a question about how many refrigeration units are even capable of doing that,” Cuomo said. “If we have to set up at schools, gyms, Javits Center, if we have to use the National Guard, whatever we have to do, we will do it.”

The questions sent to the White House were marked urgent to help move this vaccination plan past a first draft.

Once vaccines are okayed by the federal government, the governor said his own independent medical advisory panel would also approve them, to help ensure people trust them.


National Guard to help with travel advisory screenings at airports

WVIB, October 16, 2020 ::
BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) — The New York National Guard is going to begin assisting with travel advisory screenings at airports across the state.

Soldiers and Airmen will be in uniform, but they will not be carrying weapons.

This will begin Monday.

Evan Anstey is a digital content producer who has been part of the News 4 team since 2015. See more of his work here.


New York Air National Guard

Duty Calls: Top enlisted Air Guard leader retires : New York Air National Guard Command Chief Master Sgt. Maureen Dooley honored

Times Union, October 19, 2020 ::

New York Air National Guard Command Chief Master Sgt. Maureen Dooley has been honored during her retirement testimony at New York National Guard Headquarters in Latham.

Dooley was recognized for 33 years of exemplary service in the Air Force and Air National Guard.

She was a member of the Eastern New York Air Defense Sector team at Rome that dispatched jet fighters to intercept hijacked airliners Sept. 11, 2001.

Major Gen. Dawn Deskins, deputy director of the Air National Guard and former commander of the Eastern New York Air Defense Sector in Rome, who worked with Dooley before being reassigned to Washington, D.C., led the ceremony.

Dooley has served as the top enlisted airman in the 5,600 member New York Air National Guard since February of 2018.

Command Chief Master Sgt. Denny L. Richardson, who formerly served as the senior enlisted airman in the 109th Airlift Wing at Stratton Air National Guard Base in Scotia, replaced Dooley.

Dooley previously served as the senior enlisted leader and superintendent of the 224th Air Defense Group in Rome. She served in the active Air Force from 1979 to 1987 and has served in the Air National Guard since December 1995. She had a break in service from 1987 to 1995.
As command chief master sergeant for the New York Air National Guard, Dooley served as the advisor to Maj. Gen. Anthony LaBarge, commander of the New York Air National Guard, on issues related to enlisted airmen.

The New York Air National Guard is located at five bases across New York and operates the MQ-9 remotely piloted aircraft, the C-17 Globemaster III strategic transport, the LC-130 ski-equipped Hercules transport in Scotia, and the HH-60 search and rescue helicopter and the HC-130 search and rescue aircraft.

Most of the force consists of traditional Air National guardsmen who serve on a part-time basis, but others serve full-time to ensure readiness.

The New York Air National Guard also includes the Eastern Air Defense Sector, where Dooley had served, responsible for the air defense of the United States east of the Mississippi.

After joining the Air Force in 1979, she served as an aircraft maintenance specialist on the F-4E the F-15 fighter and the T-33 training aircraft before leaving the Air Force.

In December 1995, Dooley enlisted in the New York Air National Guard and joined what was then the Northeast Air Defense Sector of the North American Aerospace Defense Command, and is responsible for identifying and tracking aircraft flying over the United States and Canada. The unit directs fighters to defend North American airspace.

Dooley worked in tracking and identification positions and also served in weapons director, air surveillance, mission crew controller and noncommissioned officer operations superintendent before becoming the chief enlisted manager of the 224th Support Squadron in 2014. She served as the senior enlisted leader at the 224th Air Defense Group from 2016 until January 2018.

She is a Distinguished Graduate of the Air Force Senior NCO Academy and holds a degree in space technology from the Community College of Air Force.

Dooley has earned a Meritorious Service Medal, an Air Force Commendation Medal, an Air Force Achievement Medal, a Joint Meritorious Unit Award, an Air Force Organizational Excellence Award, and a Combat Readiness Medal.

**Jungle warfare school**

A Watervliet resident and a member of the New York Air National Guard’s 109th Airlift Wing is heading for the Brazilian army’s jungle training center along the Amazon River.

Air National Guard Sr. Airman Caleb Lapinel has been selected to attend a six-week long International Jungle Operations Course the Brazilian army runs for foreign students at its Center for Jungle Warfare Instruction in Manaus, Brazil.
Jungle warfare experts consider the Brazilian training center to be the toughest and best in the world.

The New York National Guard has a training relationship with the Brazilian military through the National Guard’s State Partnership Program. The program pairs national militaries with state National Guards.

Lapinel said he applied to attend the school this year because: “I thought it would be a really cool thing to do.”

He is an intelligence specialist in the 109th Airlift Wing’s Operations Support Squadron in Scotia.

“The Brazilian jungle warfare course was made for Airman Lapinel, not only because he is in excellent physical condition but because he is also mentally tough,” said New York Air National Guard Command Chief Denny Richardson.

“He is as strong as they come and has demonstrated his ability to rise under pressure. Airman Lapinel is always in search of a challenge and this will definitely challenge him but I am confident in his ability to persevere and overcome this and any obstacle.”

News of your soldiers and units can be sent to Duty Calls, Terry Brown, Times Union, Box 15000, Albany, NY 12212 or brownt@timesunion.com.


Return to top

New York Army National Guard

Army Guard: warfight capable and responsive to governors

Amy.mil, October 18,2020::

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Army National Guard continues to play a vital role in national security, providing forces that are both warfighting capable and governor responsive, the Army Guard’s top general said at the annual Association of the U.S. Army conference.

"Just a couple months ago, at our highest point in June, we had 99,000 Army Guardsmen supporting COVID-19 response, civil unrest response and the overseas mission," Army Lt. Gen. Jon Jensen, the director of the Army Guard, said during a symposium at the conference that included a panel discussion on the Army Guard’s busy year.
Additionally, Army Guard Soldiers have also responded to wildfires, hurricanes and provided support along the Southwest border in what some have been calling the "Year of the Guard."

"The scope of response has been incredible," Jensen said Oct. 13 at the conference, held virtually this year. He added that the missions undertaken by the Army Guard fill out the National Guard's mission triad of supporting the warfight, responding in the homeland and building enduring partnerships.

But, stressed Jensen, it's the Army Guard's ability to train for and complete the combat mission that allows it to be successful in other areas, such as responding to COVID-19.

Still ongoing, Army Guard members have supported COVID-19 response efforts in all 50 states, three territories and the District of Columbia. Early response efforts focused on New York City, which was one of the first COVID-19 epicenters in the U.S.

"We started with 200 Soldiers in the New York City suburb of New Rochelle and quickly grew to more than 3,700 troops across the state," said Army Maj. Gen. Raymond Shields, the adjutant general of the New York National Guard.

New York Army Guard members took on missions such as disinfecting high traffic public areas and distributing food to those who needed it.

"Between March and August, we distributed more than 52 million meals in New York City alone and almost another 2 million upstate," said Shields.

They also provided logistical support for the COVID-19 response.

"Our transportation, logistical and warehousing efforts exceeded anything we had ever done previously," said Shields. "We staffed seven warehouses holding over 30,000 pallets of supplies with logistics Soldiers for reception, tracking and delivery of critical items."

Perhaps the most noteworthy mission was converting New York City's Jacob K. Javits Conference Center into a temporary medical facility, said Shields.

"A first was working with the Army Corps of Engineers to construct alternative care facilities and to convert the Javits Convention Center in New York City into a medical center that eventually treated 1,095 COVID-19 patients," said Shields.

New York Army Guard members also worked behind the scenes staffing COVID-19 call centers, assisting the New York City medical examiner's office and processing COVID-19 test kits at state labs.

Shields said the geographic area of the response effort was one of the biggest challenges New York Guard members faced.
"The COVID pandemic response was across our entire state," said Shields. "There was no region that could draw personnel or resources that wasn't already preparing or involved in pandemic response."

That was different from previous response efforts, such as 9/11 or Hurricane Sandy in 2012, that focused on specific areas.

But the New York Guard was able to meet that challenge, said Shields.

"The Soldiers and Airmen of the New York National Guard have done a tremendous job in being flexible and responsive to the needs of their fellow citizens," he said.

Throughout this year, Army Guard members have also been kept busy by wildfires in California, Oregon and Washington state.

"Nearly 2,000 members from the California National Guard and surrounding states are involved in battling wildfires," said Jensen.

In California, wildfires have been burning in roughly 4,700 square miles of the state, or an area roughly the size of Connecticut, said Army Maj. Gen. Matthew Beavers, the California National Guard's assistant adjutant general for Army.

California Army National Guard Soldiers have played a big role in response efforts, both on the ground and in the air.

"Our rotary-wing aviators have flown 901 hours, dropped 1.93 million gallons of water across 2,335 drops," said Beavers, adding that includes aircrews who flew through heavy smoke and fire to rescue some 200 people trapped by wildfires near Fresno, California.

"It demonstrates the capability of our Army aviators and the unique opportunity this type of flying delivers," said Beavers. "We are flying at high altitudes, at night under night vision goggles with limited visibility. It's very high-precision flying."

The flying, said Beavers, also increases readiness for the Guard's warfight mission.

"These experiences are unparalleled and really speak to the very nature of Army aviation," he said. "This type of flying builds readiness. Our crews aren't simply doing laps around Fort Hood banking hours. This type of flying absolutely ensures that lives will be saved in the warfight."

Aircrews from the California Army Guard aren't the only ones who have responded to wildfires in the Golden State. Additional aircrews and aircraft from surrounding states and across the country have assisted under the Emergency Management Assistance Compact. The EMAC allows for Guard assets in one state to be used seamlessly in another, should there be a need.
"We have 15 helicopters from across the Army Guard," said Beavers. "We are forever indebted to them for supporting us, and we’re likely to get additional aircraft from Mississippi and Oklahoma."

Those additional assets, and the Army Guard's ability to respond, have meant positive results, said Beavers.

"We're achieving the desired effects at the right time and the right place to save lives," he said.

Army Guard Soldiers have also helped respond to civil disturbances after the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis in May. In Wisconsin, Army Guard members were also brought on duty in August when Jacob Blake was shot by police in Kenosha.

"Much like the rest of the country, protests began in cities across Wisconsin in the days following his death," said Air Force Maj. Gen. Paul Knapp, adjutant general of the Wisconsin National Guard. "Unfortunately, a few of those protests turned violent."

The Wisconsin Guard received a request for assistance from Kenosha County. Upon approval from Wisconsin's governor, 125 Wisconsin Army National Guard Soldiers were mobilized Aug. 24 and on the ground in Kenosha, said Knapp.

That number would increase to more than 2,000 Soldiers. Knapp stressed that Guard members were on duty in support of local officials. "We always serve in a supporting role," he said, adding that partnerships with state and local agencies were critical.

"Our partnership with local officials, local law enforcement and federal agencies paid off in ensuring that we could all preserve public safety, while simultaneously facilitating an environment in which people could safely exercise their First Amendment rights to demonstrate peacefully," said Knapp.

Army Guard members also continued to train for the warfight mission, using prevention measures from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Army guidelines to help prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

"We executed a medical screening process and direct leadership involvement with each Soldier and their family to mitigate the risk of exposure," said Army Col. Timothy Kemp, commander of the Minnesota Army National Guard's 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 34th Infantry Division, whose unit took part in a brigade training rotation at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California.

The brigade trained at Fort Hood last summer and was gearing up for its NTC training rotation when the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

"We had make-up gunnery and an aggressive staff training plan scheduled to conduct prior to NTC when the United States and Minnesota were impacted by the spread of the novel coronavirus," he said, adding that sidelined training for several months. But many of the brigade's medical troops had been part of COVID-19 response efforts, which allowed for training to resume.
"While restarting our training, we learned how experienced our medical providers were with the virus, allowing them to make accurate assessments and recommendations in an ambiguous environment," he said.

Before training at NTC, however, the brigade needed to test 5,000 Soldiers from 20 states. Mobile testing sites were set up at Camp Ripley, Minnesota, and Fort Knox, Kentucky.

"We conducted social distancing movement to those two locations," he said. "Soldiers were tested upon arrival at Camp Ripley and Fort Knox, utilizing those labs. They connected to their movement to NTC, where upon arrival, they were screened once again."

During NTC training, Soldiers who exhibited symptoms of COVID-19 were quarantined and tested.

"Contact tracing was conducted and medical assessments were completed," said Kemp. "Soldiers were returned to the unit and back to the fight once medically released."

Executing the continual testing involved multiple moving parts, Kemp added.

"Every day was a continuous consolidation and reorganization of forces at each echelon and a reassessment of the human capabilities based on their manpower," he said.

However, the training at NTC honed the brigade's skills, allowing the unit to be deployment ready.

"NTC is so critical for the development of our armored brigade combat teams in the Army National Guard and in preparation for our federal mission," said Kemp. "The Army's tremendous support of the execution of our NTC rotation demonstrates how the Army can continue to train and prepare to meet global threats."

While the training may have been complicated by COVID-19, executing those training missions – especially large-scale training – is critical to the Army Guard's ability to respond at home and overseas, said Jensen.

"Training is critical to our mission," he said. "It's those complicated missions that keep us sharp. Readiness is very important to the National Guard."

That readiness, said Jensen, directly translated to the Army Guard's ability to perform throughout the year.

"There is no doubt this year has been the Year of the Guard," he said. "Always ready, always there."

https://www.army.mil/article/240048/army_guard_warfight_capable_and_responsive_to_governors
Military working dogs in Iraq get a blood bank like their humans have (NYARNG Soldier in photo)

Stars and Stripes, October 22, 2020:

Photo Caption: U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Michael Jorgensen, right, a veterinarian technician with the 994th Medical Detachment Veterinary Service, shows how to identify the cephalic vein on a dog to Spc. Mezghan Akbar, left, a medical laboratory specialist with the 466th Medical Company, Area Support, New York National Guard, before she draws blood from Boni, a patrol explosive detector dog assigned to the K9 Task Force at Al Asad Air Base, Iraq, Oct. 7, 2020. Boni, a German Shepherd, was scheduled to have blood drawn so that the veterinary clinic can identify her blood type and initiate a walking blood bank for military working dogs. ARMANDO VASQUEZ/U.S. ARMY

Military working dog handlers in Iraq have set up a “walking blood bank” for their four-legged partners who help secure bases, hunt explosives and assist in combat missions such as the raid that killed Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi last year.

“The bank will allow for rapid treatment of injured working dogs,” Operation Inherent Resolve, the U.S.-led coalition battling ISIS in Iraq and Syria, said on Twitter Wednesday.

Boni, Bubo and Rexo, all patrol explosive detector dogs at Al Asad Air Base, were among the pups who had their blood drawn and tested earlier this month to identify their blood types, online photos show.

“This is the first time [Operation Inherent Resolve] has established a mobile blood bank for military working dogs ... and multi-purpose canines,” said Army Col. Wayne Marotto, a coalition military spokesman.

The canine blood bank was started in response to a policy the Army Medical Command surgeon general’s office issued that requires the service’s veterinarians to record blood types for all working dogs, Marotto said. For human casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan, the military has long relied on “walking blood banks” in which prescreened donors can be called up to give blood at a medical facility in case of a mass casualty event or a trauma patient in need of numerous transfusions.

Blood loss is one of the top preventable causes of combat death. Earlier this year, the Marine Corps also began testing a program in the Middle East modeled on one used by Army Rangers in Afghanistan last year that enables lifesaving transfusions on the battlefield.
The 994th Medical Detachment Veterinary Services Support and medical personnel has set up emergency response capabilities and trained health care providers to ensure the animals receive “the highest level of emergency care,” Marotto said.

Inherent Resolve did not have military canine casualty data, he said. But at least two working dogs in the U.S. Central Command area of operations were medically evacuated following injuries this year, including one from Iraq that suffered cardiac arrest, according to military statements.

Military working dogs like Conan, a Belgian Malinois who was wounded during the mission that killed ISIS leader Baghdadi last October, are “critical members of our forces,” U.S. Central Command boss Gen. Frank McKenzie said last year. Conan had accompanied special operations troops on some 50 missions.

In hot Middle Eastern weather, the availability of donor blood also can be critical for canines off the battlefield. In June, an Air Force pup named Cvoky was rushed by helicopter from Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia to Kuwait’s Camp Arifjan after its body temperature reached nearly 110 degrees.

At 104 degrees, dogs begin suffering heat stroke, the Humane Society of the United States website says. Heat injuries can cause internal organ damage and hemorrhage, and few dogs survive if they reach as high a body temperature as Cvoky, a military veterinarian said in a statement after the incident.

But in that case, a pint of blood from a Navy dog named Army helped save his life, the statement said.

“We got the call that my dog, Army, might be a match,” it quoted dog handler Petty Officer 2nd Class Sera Tamez as saying. “It feels really good to help one of our own!”


PFOA Issue

Schumer: Stewart Air Guard base PFAS cleanup could be delayed indefinitely

Midhudson News, October 21, 2020 :

NEWBURGH – After recently learning that the United States Air Force (USAF) may not include Stewart Air National Guard Base in the towns of New Windsor and Newburgh in its next round of priority cleanup sites – because of a bureaucratic internal policy penalizing Newburgh for no longer using Lake Washington as their drinking water source – U.S. Senator Charles Schumer has asked Air Force Secretary
Barbara Barrett to include the Stewart base in next year’s tranche of Remedial Investigations, allowing for the critical next step of PFAS cleanup to finally begin.

The senator said the Air Force selects priority cleanup sites based on the immediate health and safety risks impacting their surrounding communities and, therefore, provides preference to sites where contamination is impacting local drinking water sources.

Recently, the senator learned that because the City of Newburgh switched off its main drinking water source after the discovery of toxic PFAS in Washington Lake in May of 2016, it may be penalized and ultimately left out in the USAF’s next round of priority cleanup site selections, as it is no longer considered a drinking water source, according to USAF’s bureaucratic, antiquated, and illogical guidelines.

“The bottom line is Washington Lake was and will be Newburgh’s drinking water source, and the United States Air Force can and must clean up the toxic PFAS mess they made in the lake and its tributaries with all due speed,” said Schumer. “Newburgh’s residents have been plagued for far too long by the toxic PFAS contamination of their drinking water, and they should not be punished for the swift, logical, and health conscientious decision to protect the wellbeing of their community. The Air Force must immediately remove this—and any—roadblock that would prevent the continuation of the imperative cleanup efforts to restore Washington Lake and the safe, clean drinking water that Newburgh residents need and deserve.”

The senator said, “No one should fear that their health or that of their family is being damaged by the water they drink, which is why I am calling on the Air Force to immediately expedite the cleanup process, approve funding for a Remedial Investigation at Stewart ANGB, and allow the cleanup to move forward ASAP.”

“It boggles the mind that the people of Newburgh could be punished by USAF for taking prompt and wise action to protect people’s health in order to mitigate a problem created and rapidly denigrated by the Air Force for years. Talk about an absurd Catch-22,” Schumer continued. “That is why I am calling on the USAF to immediately prioritize this cleanup so the people of Newburgh can once again drink safely from Lake Washington and not fear the water seeping from Stewart ANGB.”

The senator stressed that passing over Stewart in this next round of Remedial Investigations would be unacceptable because the City of Newburgh did not lightly decide to abandon its drinking water source, rather, this emergency decision was provoked by the decades-long PFAS contamination at Stewart ANGB, at the hands of the USAF’s decades-long use of PFAS-producing firefighting foam, endangering the health and safety of thousands of Newburgh residents.

Last month, Schumer made a personal phone call to Air Force Secretary Barbara Barrett, urging her to select Newburgh in the next tranche of Remedial Investigations. Additionally, late last year, after Schumer secured over $2.4 million for the project, the USAF finally installed its first filtration device on Recreation Pond, marking the first concrete step in stopping the PFAS from flowing off base and restoring safe, clean drinking water for residents. However, the senator explained that this is an interim device and without knowing why toxic water is still flowing from Stewart and where it is
flowing to, the USAF can’t find a permanent fix, especially considering that there is a need for additional data surrounding drinking sources.

The senator has a long history of advocacy for the communities surrounding Stewart. In the fall of 2018, Schumer met with then-Air Force Secretary Heather Wilson to urge the Air Force to rev up the pace of PFAS contamination investigations and remediation efforts. Schumer also successfully worked to include his amendment to provide funding for the Air National Guard to make payments to reimburse New York State and local water authorities for their ongoing remediation efforts and cleanup of PFAS contamination due to Air National Guard-related activities in the FY2019 Senate Defense Appropriations bill.

In July of 2018, after Schumer’s push, a report concerning the health effects of PFAS was finally released to the public, after its release was seemingly delayed because of political considerations. In September 2017, after Schumer’s urging, DoD immediately began their Site Investigation sampling which included Recreation Pond, another Schumer request, which yielded the highest concentration of PFOS according to the NYDEC’s original testing. In June 2017, during an in-person meeting with then-Secretary of Defense James Mattis, Schumer called on the DoD to participate in the remediation of toxic PFAS contamination. In May 2017, during a one-on-one meeting with then-Air Force Secretary Heather Wilson, Schumer called on the Air Force to pledge that they would prioritize the prompt remediation of the PFAS contamination at Stewart ANGB.

Perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS) and perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) are two types of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), a group of manufactured chemicals, and are persistent in the environment and resist degradation. These toxic chemicals are often used to manufacture products like fabric protectors, firefighting foam, and stain repellents. They are common primary ingredients in the firefighting foam that was used at Air National Guard bases for training and fire-suppression exercises, according to state regulators. Exposure to PFAS chemicals has been linked to certain cancers and other serious adverse health effects.

Schumer’s recent letter to Secretary Barrett appears below.

Dear Secretary Barrett:

I write with great concern that the United States Air Force (USAF) may not include Stewart Air National Guard Base (Stewart) in New Windsor, New York, as part of next year’s tranche of funded Remedial Investigations (RI). Stewart has serious PFAS contamination that threatens the local water table and it deserves to be funded in fiscal year 2021 (FY21).

It is my understanding that USAF selects priority cleanup sites based on the immediate health and safety risks impacting surrounding communities and therefore provides preference to sites impacting local drinking water sources; and you would be correct to assess that Washington Lake is no longer Newburgh’s drinking water source. However, Madame Secretary, I would be remiss not to point out that Newburgh did not lightly decide to abandon its main drinking water source, rather, this emergency decision was provoked by the May 2016 discovery of decades-long
contamination from Stewart, endangering the health and safety of thousands of Newburgh residents.

Over four years later, PFAS-ridden ground, surface, and stormwater continues flowing off base contaminating the community watershed at rates above the state and federal thresholds. If we still don’t know all the PFAS exposure pathways, and the recent Expanded Site Investigation (ESI) shows that to be the case, then it is impossible to write off the impact to local water sources despite the diversion of Silver Stream and the interim filtration device. The recent elevated screening levels discussed in the ESI have caused Newburgh residents great concern as they wait for USAF to find all the sources and pathways of its PFAS contamination which can only be assessed if the USAF immediately prioritizes the RI. Without knowing why toxic water is still flowing from Stewart and where it is flowing to, USAF can’t once again turn its back on Stewart’s ongoing high containment levels, especially considering that there is a need for additional data surrounding drinking sources. Nor can the USAF rely on a state filtration device, or its own interim device, to filter toxic water without knowing its source or path. Making these assumptions would only further endanger the imminent health and safety of the communities surrounding Stewart.

That’s why I urge you to take the next step of this incredibly drawn out, yet desperately needed, process and select Stewart for the Remedial Investigation with all due speed. This request is made not just as a result of my personal impatience but results from four years of patience from thousands of Newburgh residents and the thousands more before them that have been impacted by decades of contaminated drinking water and can now be penalized due to USAF’s bureaucratic internal protocol.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter. Please do not hesitate to contact my staff should you have any questions.

Sincerely,