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DOCCS Support

Borrello Blasts \$100M Spending On National Guard In Prisons

Observer, April 10, 2025 :

State Sen. George Borrello voted for the most recent budget extender bill to keep state money flowing during the impasse between legislative Democrats and Gov. Kathy Hochul.

Budget extenders are nothing new the past couple of years in Albany after years of on-time state budgets under former Gov. Andrew Cuomo. But the growth in the extender bill passed last week rankled the Sunset Bay Republican because, in Borrello's words, the spending is avoidable.

“I want to spend a little bit of time on the salaries here,” Borrello said last week on the Senate floor. “As was mentioned, last year for a similar time period we allocated \$7 million. Now this year, \$45 million, and admittedly largely for the National Guard troops. So I’ve heard a lot of hand-wringing, a lot of consternation about missing federal funding. It was cleaned out of the Department of Health and it’s a lot of money. However we’re spending \$100 million a month for the National Guard. That’s the governor’s numbers. There’s a simple solution to this — the governor could federalize those National Guard troops. That \$100 million cost would then go to the federal government.”

There is some disagreement over the \$100 million figure. State Budget Director Blake Washington told reporters in late March that the state is paying “well over \$100 million per month post-strike” for the National Guard mission and other interventions taken in the facilities to protect workers and the incarcerated population, according to Specrum News. That was the number Sen. Dan Stec, R-Queensbury, and Borrello quoted on the Senate floor. Republicans’ have estimated the cost of National Guard members staffing prisons to be around \$20 million. Liz Krueger, D-New York City and Senate Finance Committee chairwoman, said she doubts the \$100 million figure, but couldn’t disprove it either.

“I don’t have a breakdown. I’m not sure where that \$100 million came from,” Krueger said. “I would point out that I believe the 2,000 people being referenced before were fired with cause, so we don’t have an option to have them remain in their positions. But I sort of doubt we’re paying five times the amount of money for the National Guard as we paid for correctional officers because as I recall there were a great deal of complaints that the National Guard got paid so little to do the same jobs in the prisons. So it would surprise me, but I don’t have the data.”

Borrello has been critical of Hochul throughout this year’s wildcat prison strikes that ended with the state’s firing of more than 2,000 guards who went on strike over poor working conditions. Last week state corrections Commissioner Daniel Martuscello directed prison leaders to begin identifying inmates who were convicted of minor crimes and already set for release within 15 to 110 days to be considered for an early discharge. Borrello criticized the early release plan, saying they may not have been necessary had Hochul handled the correction officer firings differently.

In February, Borrello issued a formal letter to Hochul demanding an immediate halt to the deployment of 6,500 National Guard members in New York’s prisons and calling on Hochul to negotiate in good faith with striking correction officers. In his letter, Senator Borrello cited reports from National Guard members and their families, who describe inhumane conditions, lack of proper safety protocols, and dangerously inadequate training. A retired Air National Guard officer warned that guard members with no corrections experience were being assigned to oversee some of the most violent inmates in the state — calling the situation “a powder keg about to explode.”

The region's state senator continued his criticism of Hochul's handling of the corrections officer strike on the Senate floor, particularly in comparison with Hochul's criticism of federal funding cuts that she says put New York programs at risk.

"So if you want to know what the cost of that is, for the governor's, I guess arrogance, it's \$100 million a month to the people in New York state," Borrello said. "There's a very simple solution she won't take. Due to the politics of this, there's only a concern for the money that's flowing one way, not the money that's flowing the other way and I think that that's pretty egregious. The taxpayers of New York state are covering the cost of the governor's inability to lead in this particular moment, for this particular crisis of her own creation. I'm a yes on this bill, but just remember, there is a cost to this for the governor's mismanagement of this prison crisis – and it's \$100 million a month."

<https://www.observertoday.com/news/top-stories/2025/04/borrello-blasts-100m-spending-on-national-guard-in-prisons/>

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New York Guard Soldiers, Airmen on Duty for Prison Guard Strike

Air National Guard, April 9, 2025 :

ALBANY, N.Y. – More than 8,200 New York National Guard Soldiers and Airmen mobilized recently in response to a three-week correction officers' strike that began at two correctional facilities and eventually impacted 42 of 45 New York prisons.

More than 12,000 officers walked off the job, violating a state law forbidding them from striking. The strike began Feb. 17, and Gov. Kathy Hochul declared it over on March 10.

Hochul signed an emergency order on Feb. 18 that directed the New York National Guard to mobilize and replace the striking Guards on Feb. 19.

At its peak, 6,846 Guardsmen were on duty, with more than 5,300 personnel in the prisons.

During the last correction officers strike in 1979, then-Gov. Hugh Cary deployed 12,000 National Guard personnel to replace striking prison guards.

The Guard Soldiers and Airmen deployed by Hochul watched over inmates in medium-security prison dorms, maximum-security cell blocks and minimum-security campuses. Their duties included conducting head counts, delivering meals and monitoring special housing units for inmates in solitary confinement.

Maj. Gen. Ray Shields, the adjutant general of New York, said he was proud of how the Soldiers and Airmen rose to the challenge.

“Their response to the prison strike and the ongoing staffing shortages of the Department of Corrections was phenomenal,” Shields said.

“They endured involuntary mobilization, austere living conditions, stressful duty, unfamiliar interactions with incarcerated individuals, long days and nights, and uncertainty when the mission would end,” he said.

“And most significantly,” Shields said, “being away from family, friends, and work, our service members answered the call and went above and beyond what I could ever expect.”

Despite the official end date of March 10, more than 4,400 Soldiers, Airmen and Naval Militia members remained on duty on April 1, when the mission transitioned into a volunteer-only force.

The governor directed Guard Soldiers and Airmen, joined by members of the Naval Militia, to remain on duty to ensure the understaffed correction officers’ force could conduct duties without excessive overtime.

Joint Task Force-Sentinel, operating out of the Thompson Road Armory at Hancock Field Air National Guard Base in Syracuse, oversaw 3,135 Soldiers and Airmen as of April 7. Those Soldiers and Airmen supplemented 10,000 correction officers who returned to work.

The goal was to shrink the force further and bring more volunteers on board.

The initial mobilization order on Feb. 18 was for New York Army National Guard units.

The commanders of the 27th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, the 153rd Troop Command, and the 369th Sustainment Brigade were each assigned operational areas and units across the state.

The 153rd was responsible for Western New York prisons, the 369th handled prisons in the Hudson Valley and the 27th Brigade supported Central New York and New York’s North Country, the Adirondacks and the region along the Canadian border.

The 42nd Expeditionary Combat Aviation Brigade also was placed on active duty to move people and supplies quickly across New York.

For example, three UH-60M Black Hawks picked up 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry Soldiers at a baseball field in the Bronx on Feb. 20 and transported them 250 miles north to Bare Hill Correctional Facility near Malone.

The aircrews flew more than 600 hours and transported 1,050 passengers by the end of the mission.

Additional correction officers began walking off the job when advance parties arrived at some prisons on Feb. 18. The Soldiers and supervisors remained to handle those officers' duties.

Supporting the New York Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) was familiar to some units such as the Auburn-based 102nd Military Police Battalion, whose federal military role includes establishing and operating military prisons.

However, planning and executing prison operations was new for other units such as the Buffalo-based 152nd Brigade Engineer Battalion and Niagara Falls-based 2nd Squadron, 101st Cavalry Regiment.

Capt. Timothy Sullivan, commander of the Brigade Engineer Battalion's military intelligence company, said his Soldiers learned on the job at Orleans Correctional Facility in Albion.

"They were able to adapt, communicate, follow orders and do the mission to the best of their ability," Sullivan said.

Soldiers worked in pairs or groups of three to ensure safety.

Spc. Tamia Grant, an automated logistics specialist in the 101st Expeditionary Signal Battalion, worked in the Special Housing Unit, which is the solitary confinement area, of Eastern Correctional Facility in Napanoch.

She spent 12-hour shifts checking on inmates every 30 minutes. Leaders worked hard to ensure the Soldiers were comfortable, Grant said.

"My leadership is doing an amazing job," Grant said.

"If we have any comments, questions or concerns, they have an open-door policy."

"We can go to them and tell them maybe, like, we're not feeling comfortable in an area, and they'll take the proper precautions to move us around and switch us for different shifts," she said.

Leaders at all levels visited prisons to check on the troops and the mission.

"I need to see what my Soldiers are experiencing," said Col. Patrick Clare, the commander of the 369th.

Col. Christopher Guilmette, commander of the 153rd, compared what he saw on his visits to stories of the 1979 prison strike he had heard from his father, who served in the Army Guard then.

“In ’79, the responding Guardsmen had to cross the correction officers’ picket line to enter the facility, and the striking correction officers were resistive and violent,” Guilmette said.

“Supplies and care packages had to be flown by helicopter into the prison perimeter to avoid crossing the picket line,” Guilmette said. “I am glad we did not encounter anything close to that situation.”

As the mission began, conditions were austere. Soldiers lived inside the prisons, sleeping on cots in unused gyms, dorms or wherever they could find space.

Living inside the prison could be overwhelming, said Pvt. Cornell Ashby, an automated logistical specialist in the 133rd Composite Supply Company.

“Some days, I wake up and I feel like a Soldier,” said Ashby, who was assigned to Fishkill Correctional Facility. “Other days, I see the barbed wire and it feels like I’m something else.”

Army Guard units mobilized first with 6,673 Soldiers who were part of the mission. Also, 1,397 members of the New York Air National Guard were assigned to the Army Guard brigades to reinforce units already in the prisons. Eventually, 185 Naval Militia members also went on duty.

Conditions improved as the mission progressed. Starlink internet systems helped Soldiers and Airmen keep in touch with families, be entertained and work on academics. The systems also made it easier for companies across the state to communicate with their headquarters.

Catered meals and DoorDash food deliveries replaced meals, ready to eat.

Mattresses replaced cots, and Soldiers and Airmen moved to hotels when possible. The Division of Military and Naval Affairs contracted with 125 hotels and motels across the state for rooms.

Personnel also received days off when possible.

“Soldiers are trained to adapt to difficult conditions until we can resolve those difficulties,” said Capt. Saul Rodriguez, commander of the 133rd Composite Supply Company. “But we are always actively working to fix their conditions so they can succeed.”

“Internet access was a big boost to morale before we were able to get hotel rooms, because it enabled them to take a mental break,” he said.

“Morale got a lot better in that second week when we could get them into hotel rooms,” he said.

Spc. Justin Hall, a member of Alpha Company of the 427th Brigade Support Battalion who was assigned to Auburn Correctional Facility, said his unit leaders looked out for the Soldiers.

“Our leadership does rounds. They will check on every floor, make sure every Soldier is perfectly fine. If we need anything, they will get it for us,” Hall said, adding that his hours were fair and he got about seven hours of sleep daily.

“We had Walmart runs to get, you know, personal needs and stuff like that. They made sure we were fed, and we had showers overall,” he said.

Grant said he also appreciated the governor’s decision to compensate Soldiers for the rigors of the mission. They received retroactive basic housing allowance pay and \$2,000 special duty pay each pay period.

“I feel like the TAG (the Adjutant General) and the Army National Guard, is doing a phenomenal job with making sure everyone gets their pay and just keeping us updated on everything and not withholding information,” she said.

“As soon as they get the information, they’re putting it out immediately,” Grant added.

The service members did more than keep order in the prisons.

Pfc. Quintel Turner, a combat engineer with the 152nd Brigade Engineer Battalion, defended an inmate during a violent attack by other inmates.

Air National Guard Staff Sgt. Austin Basile, an Air Force structural maintenance specialist from the 106th Rescue Wing, saved inmates from overdosing two separate times.

The 106th Regional Training Institute partnered with DOCCS to create a training program to prepare Guardsmen for the continuing mission. The one-week course, held at DOCCS headquarters in Albany at Camp Smith and Groveland Correctional Facility, shared basic correction officer skills.

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<https://www.ang.af.mil/Media/Article-Display/Article/4150493/new-york-guard-soldiers-airmen-on-duty-for-prison-guard-strike/>

New York Guard Soldiers, Airmen on Duty for Prison Guard Strike

NationalGuard.mil, April 8, 2025 :

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<https://www.nationalguard.mil/News/Article-View/Article/4148878/new-york-guard-soldiers-airmen-on-duty-for-prison-guard-strike/>

National Guard still at NY prisons: How many left after 3-week strike? And for how long?

Times Herald Record, April 11, 2025 :

A massive walkout by security staff in New York's prison system in mid-February drove Gov. Kathy Hochul to take drastic measures: She deployed thousands of National Guard troops into the prisons to take the place of striking workers.

Seven weeks later, the strike is over but more than 3,000 Guard members are still on prison duty, partly because of how the 22-day crisis ended. State officials fired some 2,000 correction officers and sergeants who failed to return to their jobs by March 10, deepening the staff shortage that helped fuel the walkout.

The initial Guard activation was mandatory, meaning anyone who was called up had to go. The state later awarded a bonus to make the assignment more palatable. On top of their active-duty pay and housing allowance, the deployed troops were given an extra \$2,000 each two-week pay period — an additional \$4,000 per month.

The deployment terms changed on April 1. As of that date, Guard members could leave their prison assignments and only those who opted to stay remained on duty. The bonuses were cut in half to \$1,000 per pay period.

The number of Guard members voluntarily taking part in the mission totaled 3,115 as of Wednesday, April 9, said Eric Durr, a spokesman for the state Division of Military and Naval Affairs. Most of those troops are stationed in the correctional facilities themselves to bolster staffing, but some are assigned to Guard bases or administrative offices for supporting roles.

How long can NY continue to post Guard members in prisons?

There's no time limit on the prison mission or any other Guard deployment. Hochul, who declared a statewide disaster emergency on Feb. 19 when she activated the Guard, issued another executive order on Wednesday night that extends that declaration another month, until May 9. The extension was needed "to support safe and effective operations at correctional facilities," the order read.

The state has drawn those troops from from three, part-time forces with about 20,000 total personnel: Army National Guard, Air National Guard and Naval Militia.

Guard duty typically entails training for one weekend each month and for two weeks during the summer. But members can be activated at any time for an emergency, as they were at the outset of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020. More recently, they have been deployed to New York City to help manage the influx of migrants in 2022 and to bolster security in the subway system.

Republican state senators have been critical of the prison deployment, an unusual and potentially dangerous assignment for which Guard members weren't trained.

Even though the assignment is now optional, state Sen. Mark Walczyk of Watertown said in an interview that he worries about the long-term impact on the retention and recruitment of Guard members.

Asked what alternative Hochul had, Walczyk suggested the crisis could have been defused sooner.

"I think if she had addressed the safety concerns that the officers had, they would have gone back into the prisons," he said.

Officers walked off the job because of chronic staff shortages, heavy overtime mandates and what they said were unsafe conditions. They spoke out against a 2021 law that limits solitary confinement to 15 days. State officials have suspended the law — the HALT Act, or Humane Alternatives to Long-Term Solitary Confinement — since the strike began and agreed to discuss ways the law could be improved.

What else has happened since the strike ended?

Several strike-related lawsuits about being waged in the courts. Among the issues being litigated: whether workers violated the state's Taylor Law, which prohibits public employees from striking; if the state improperly canceled workers' health insurance; and if fired workers must be decertified as peace officers. Decertification means they must repeat their training if they get jobs in county jails.

The state Department of Corrections and Community Supervision hasn't responded to questions about current staffing levels. Officials said when the strike ended last month that about 10,000 workers remained, down from 13,500 correction officers and sergeants before the walkout began. They promised an aggressive recruiting campaign.

About 32,000 people are incarcerated in New York's 42 prisons. As many as 700 who are due to leave prison within 110 days are being considered for early release because of the staffing shortage, state officials announced last week.

The union representing correction officers and sergeants — the New York State Correctional Officers and Police Benevolent Association, or NYSCOPBA — announced last week it had requested an urgent meeting with DOCCS about work conditions and said it has been urging the state to rehire the 2,000 fired workers.

Hochul's office didn't respond to a request for comment on the prospect of rehiring. But it seems unlikely, given that she has barred the fired officers from ever holding any state job and has blasted the strike for endangering the civilian prison staff, the incarcerated population and the areas surrounding the prisons.

<https://eu.lohud.com/story/news/politics/albany-watch/2025/04/11/ny-prison-strike-how-many-national-guard-members-are-still-on-duty/83010951007/>

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Former prison guard speaks out

WHEC, April 7, 2025 ::

Note: This story mentions NYNG.

GROVELAND, N.Y. – This week marks one month since a strike that stressed New York state prison staffing ended. During the strike, 2,000 guards were fired for not returning to work.

Jill Folts-Gaylord, a former New York state prison guard, shared her experience after being fired nearly a month ago. She was on a pre-approved vacation and medical leave during the strike.

“I was considered AWOL for one day during the strike,” Folts-Gaylord said. “I was actually out of work on a medical.”

Folts-Gaylord lost her health insurance and is now responsible for her surgery costs. Her surgery was February 25th, but the insurance was backdated to the 19th. “So now I’m on the hook for that surgery,” she said.

She expressed concern about the working conditions for guards who returned. “For my blue family, they walked back in her conditions now that are probably ten times worse than what they were before,” Folts-Gaylord said.

Folts-Gaylord said she is pursuing legal action due to her situation and told News10NBC’s Kristi Blake other fired guards in her situation are too.

The Department of Corrections and Community Supervision said they do not comment on specific employee leave or pending litigation but continue to review concerns on a case-by-case basis.

Folts-Gaylord’s daughter, who also worked at Groveland, resigned after feeling unsafe when the National Guard took over operations.

The Department of Corrections and Community Supervision confirmed that more than 2,500 National Guardsmen remain inside New York prisons.

<https://www.whec.com/local/former-prison-guard-talks-nearly-one-month-after-being-fired-during-strike-she-didnt-join/>

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'\$100M per month': State estimates cost of National Guard working in prisons

WKBW, April 10, 2025 :

ATTICA, N.Y. (WKBW) — The corrections officer strike ended several weeks ago, but its impacts continue to be felt. National Guard deployment costs New York State millions, and inmate mail is now set for screening.

According to the United States Army, 4,400 National Guard members remain on duty in New York prisons as of April 1.

National Guard soldiers could be seen working outside of Attica Correctional Thursday afternoon.

The Army also says those on duty received both a retroactive basic housing allowance pay and \$2,000 special duty pay each pay period.

Governor Kathy Hochul's office told reporters that's costing the state "well over \$100 million per month."

"Certainly, post a prison strike, we have new costs that will come on to the state budget for provisioning the National Guard on a day-to-day basis. Those interventions alone are costing us well over \$100M per month that we did not envision so that's a necessary input to this process as well."

Budget Director Blake Washington

"You've got these untrained National Guard soldiers in there doing a job they really should not be doing, and it's costing taxpayers a fortune," State Senator George Borrello said. "From what I have heard from the leadership in the National Guard, this could be a yearlong deployment. That's \$1.2 billion to taxpayers."

State Senator Daniel Stec suggests the solution is to re-hire the 2,000 officers fired for not returning to work at the end of the strike.

In the meantime, the State Department of Corrections took a step to protect its employees.

Thursday afternoon, DOCCS announced it has entered a contract to screen inmates' mail, fulfilling a promise made in their end-of-strike agreement.

"Long overdue, and they act like nobody has ever done this in the past," Borrello said. "These packages coming in unscreened is where a lot of contraband is coming from, drugs, weapons and other things."

The mail screening will start Friday in five prisons across the state. That initial list includes both Attica and Wyoming.

In mid-March, nearly two dozen Attica Correctional staff members were hospitalized because of chemical exposures, including two who became ill after finding a white powder in an envelope.

https://www.wkbw.com/news/local-news/100-mil-per-month-state-estimates-cost-of-national-guard-working-in-prisons-doccs-to-screen-inmates-mail#google_vignette

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Work ban partially lifted for fired corrections officers

WCAX, April 11, 2025 :

ALBANY, N.Y. (WCAX) - The New York executive order that banned fired corrections officers from working is now over.

After 3 weeks of strikes, around 2,000 guards across the state were fired. Governor Kathy Hochul's executive order banned them from working in state or local government.

That ban is only for state jobs now.

Our sister station WWNY reports that some towns and counties are already interviewing those fired for job openings. However, some leaders in our region are sounding the alarm about safety in the state's prisons.

State Senator Dan Stec announced a bill that allows fired corrections officers to go back to work at state prisons.

The bills' drafters say National Guard members deployed to fill staffing voids at prisons cost the state more than \$100 million a month while reinstating corrections officers costs only \$20 million.

Stec says the National Guard isn't trained to work in prisons, which creates new safety concerns. Those safety concerns were echoed by Assemblyman Billy Jones.

He says current corrections officers face longer shifts, staffing shortages, and dangerous working conditions.

Jones says the easiest solution would be to rehire the fired officers instead of relying on the guard.

<https://www.wcax.com/2025/04/11/work-ban-partially-lifted-fired-corrections-officers/>

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For Information

Army reenlists nearly two dozen soldiers ousted for refusing COVID-19 vaccine

Associated Press, April 7, 2025 ::

NOTE: This story is being used for your SA.

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Army has reenlisted more than 23 soldiers who were discharged for refusing the COVID-19 vaccine, officials said Monday, rushing to implement President Donald Trump's order that troops be rehired and given back pay.

Three people rejoined active duty Army service, and more than 20 came back either to the National Guard or the Reserve, the Army said. The soldiers have signed their contracts and were sworn in, and the active duty troops were reporting to their units, the Army said.

None of the other services has completed reenlistments yet, but all are reaching out to former troops. The Marine Corps, Air Force, Army and Navy set up new websites on Monday to provide information for service members looking to reenlist. And they are sending letters and emails and making calls to those who were discharged.

Trump has argued that the vaccine mandate wrongly pushed troops out and suggested that many would return. In an executive order signed a week after he took office, Trump said the vaccine mandate cost the military "some of our best people" and he vowed to "rehire every patriot who was fired from the military with ... backpay."

Those who may have been attracted by the offer of back pay will likely get far less money than they initially thought when Trump announced his plan. Under the details of the Pentagon offer, any wages earned during their time as civilians would be deducted from the back pay total, along with other payments they may have received.

The Pentagon made the COVID-19 vaccine mandatory in August 2021 for all service members, including those in the National Guard and Reserve. Then-Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said getting the vaccine was critical to maintaining a healthy, ready force. The Pentagon dropped the mandate in January 2023.

The initial reenlistments come as the Pentagon last week formally increased the new minimum service commitment from two to four years for those discharged for refusing a lawful order to take the vaccine.

A Feb. 7 memo sent to the secretaries of the military services said troops would be required to sign up for two years. But a memo signed April 1 by Jules Hurst III, who is doing the job of defense undersecretary for personnel, said "reinstatement will not be afforded to those who are unwilling or unable to return to active service or active status, as applicable, for four years."

The Army said the bulk of the soldiers who reenlisted were those ordered out for refusing the shot, and they signed on for four years. They will be entitled to get some back pay. Several, however, left the Army voluntarily to avoid the shot, so they are allowed to reenlist for two years and will not get back pay.

According to the new memo, there is an exception for anyone who would have been eligible for retirement within two years of the date they were originally discharged. Those service members also can reenlist for at least two years.

Roughly 8,200 troops were discharged for refusing to obey the vaccine order. They have been allowed to rejoin since 2023, but that did not include any back pay. Just 113 reenlisted.

The Army and Marine Corps have been sending out emails, texts and phone calls to service members for several weeks. The Navy and the Air Force had been waiting for the additional guidance.

According to Army spokesman Christopher Surridge, about 400 soldiers have inquired so far about the reenlistment program. Of those, about 100 are in the application process. The Army did not have estimates on how much it has given the soldiers in total back pay.

As of Friday, 472 Marines have indicated interest in learning more about returning. The Navy said about a half dozen sailors had so far expressed interest or sought more information, and the Air Force said it had not yet gotten any feedback from service members.

The limited interest reflects what service leaders said early on, which was that many troops used the vaccine as a reason to leave and have moved on with their lives.

Those eligible for back pay could get an amount that includes their basic salary, bonus payments, cost-of-living allowances and some health benefit costs. But that total will be reduced by any wages, veterans benefits, separation payments, debts and other amounts that were earned during that time.

Service members will have to provide verified tax records and other paperwork as part of the process.

According to the memo, the services must provide each person with an estimate of the amount of back pay they will receive. Service members will then have 60 days to decide whether to reenlist.

Everyone who wants to reenlist must meet all military standards, including health, fitness and moral requirements. Service members have until Feb. 28, 2026, to seek reinstatement.

<https://apnews.com/article/military-reenlist-covid-back-pay-army-a9d8560c091da8c04b793114abaf967a>

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New Mexico governor mobilizes National Guard to tackle crime emergency in Albuquerque

Associated Press, April 8, 2025 :

Note: This story mentions the New York National Guard

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham on Tuesday declared a state of emergency in New Mexico's largest city, saying that a significant increase in crime in Albuquerque warrants the help of the New Mexico National Guard.

She signed an executive order, clearing the way for several dozen troops to be deployed along the historic Route 66 corridor starting in mid-May. The order also frees up state funds for the National Guard to use as part of the effort.

Training for 60 to 70 troops already is underway, the governor's office said.

Governors typically call up the National Guard to help with natural disasters like wildfires, earthquakes, tornadoes and hurricanes. Governors in recent years also have ordered troops to address illegal crossings at the U.S.-Mexico border. In New York last year, the National Guard helped patrol the subway system following a series of high-profile crimes.

In New Mexico, Albuquerque Police Chief Harold Medina called it a crucial time for the National Guard to provide support that gives police officers more time to patrol the streets for crime.

Medina and Albuquerque Mayor Tim Keller pointed to a large chart during a news conference, saying nearly every category of crime has come down since the beginning of the year because of the work already being done by the police force.

The National Guard will not be engaging with the public, they said, but rather taking on duties that drain the time of sworn officers, like directing traffic. The troops can help secure crime scenes, distribute food and supplies to the homeless population throughout the corridor, transport prisoners, provide courthouse security and run drone operations used for locating suspects or assessing incidents, officials said.

Watchdog groups have concerns that militarizing civilian law enforcement will lead to civil rights violations.

Daniel Williams, policy advocate at the ACLU of New Mexico, called the governor's action a show of force, not a solution.

"New Mexico already has one of the highest per capita rates of people killed by police in the nation," Williams said. "History has shown that military collaboration with local law enforcement often leads to increased civil rights violations, racial profiling, and criminalization of vulnerable populations, particularly those experiencing homelessness and poverty."

It's not the first time Lujan Grisham has tried to leverage state resources to address high crime rates in Albuquerque. In 2021, the two-term Democrat temporarily assigned state police officers to the area to help local authorities tackle vehicle thefts, drug trafficking, aggressive driving and the apprehension of violent criminals with felony warrants.

The year before, then-President Donald Trump sent federal agents, including Homeland Security officers, to Albuquerque as part of an effort to contain violent crime. He also targeted Chicago and other U.S. cities with the surge in resources.

Lujan Grisham's latest emergency declaration follows a March 31 request by Albuquerque's police chief, who pointed to the fentanyl epidemic and an increase in violent juvenile crime. Medina wrote that progress has been made in reducing shootings and aggravated assaults along what is known as Central Avenue but that more resources are needed.

The New Mexico Legislature adjourned last month, drawing much criticism from law enforcement leaders, prosecutors and even the governor for failing to adequately bolster public safety in Albuquerque and other New Mexico communities.

Statistics released by the Albuquerque police department in February showed an 11% decrease in aggravated assaults in 2024 compared to the prior year, while homicides decreased for a second straight year.

<https://apnews.com/article/crime-emergency-new-mexico-national-guard-09b2d8ec41c37267e794ff0aeac07e5b>

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U.S. admiral at NATO fired, latest ouster in Trump military purge

Washington Post, April 7, 2025 ::

Note: This Story mentions Brig. Gen. Sean Flynn, a New York Army National Guard officer.

Vice Adm. Shoshana Chatfield is one of at least nine senior military leaders — and the fourth woman — removed since Trump's return to Washington.

The Trump administration has fired a top Navy admiral assigned to NATO headquarters in Brussels, people familiar with the matter said Monday, the latest ouster in an ongoing purge of senior military officers that has disproportionately targeted women.

Vice Adm. Shoshana Chatfield, the U.S. military representative to the NATO Military Committee, was notified of her removal over the weekend, three officials said, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss a sensitive personnel decision. Chatfield's abrupt dismissal marks at least the ninth firing of a senior U.S. military officer, including four women, since President Donald Trump returned to office less than three months ago.

Chatfield had served at NATO since 2023, after becoming the first woman to lead the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island. She will be replaced temporarily by Brig. Gen. Sean Flynn, an Army National Guard officer who had been Chatfield's deputy at NATO, one person familiar with the matter said.

Sean Parnell, a spokesman for Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, did not respond to a request for comment. The news was reported first by Reuters.

Chatfield had been targeted by the conservative American Accountability Foundation, which openly lobbied Hegseth for her removal before he was narrowly confirmed by the Senate in January.

Chatfield, a helicopter pilot, had said at a Women's Equality Day celebration in 2015 that "our diversity is our strength" — a phrase Hegseth publicly denounced in February as the "single dumbest" in military history. Upon becoming president of the Naval War College in 2019 during Trump's first term, Chatfield said that she wanted to see members of her team respect one another for their differences and diversity.

There are no indications Chatfield was unwilling to carry out the administration's orders, in accordance with the military's long-standing tradition of officers remaining nonpartisan.

Trump and Hegseth have pressed NATO allies to do more in their own self-defense and to rely less on the United States. And though the administration's shake-up of military leadership has faced little pushback from Republicans in Congress, Sen. Roger Wicker (Mississippi), chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, last week voiced concern about potential plans to reduce the number of U.S. troops based in Europe.

Among the other officers fired since Trump's return to the White House are Adm. Lisa Franchetti, the Navy's top officer; Adm. Linda Fagan, commandant of the Coast Guard; and Lt. Gen. Jennifer Short, senior military assistant to the defense secretary. All are expected to retire.

Men who were ousted include Gen. Charles Q. Brown Jr., who was chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; Gen. James Slife, former vice chief of staff of the Air Force; Gen. Timothy Haugh, head of the National Security Agency and U.S. Cyber Command; Lt. Gen. Joseph B. Berger III, the Army's top military lawyer; and Lt. Gen. Charles Plummer, the Air Force's top military lawyer.

A Defense Department study released in December found that women comprise 17.7 percent of the U.S. military. The percentage of women who become generals or admirals is in the single digits.

Chatfield's firing happened days after Trump ousted Haugh and his civilian deputy, Wendy Noble, last week after a meeting the president had with Laura Loomer, a far-right activist and conspiracy theorist who has Trump's ear. Loomer also advocated the firing of several civilian advisers on the White House National Security Council after making the case that they were not loyal to Trump.

The raft of firings has been criticized by Democrats and some retired military officers, citing concerns about the experience lost and potential politicization of the nonpartisan armed forces. Republicans, for the most part, have held their fire.

On Monday, Sen. Mark R. Warner (D-Virginia) quickly weighed in after the news of Chatfield's dismissal, saying that he was "deeply disturbed" by it.

“Trump’s relentless attacks on our alliances and his careless dismissal of decorated military officials make us less safe and weaken our position across the world,” he said.

Rep. Salud Carbajal (D-California), a Marine Corps veteran, posted on social media that “another distinguished military leader” had been dismissed.

“Making staffing decisions based on loyalty rather than competency,” he wrote, “is irresponsible and puts our national security at risk.”

Another exception to the muted Republican response has been Sen. Mitch McConnell (Kentucky). After the firing of Haugh, he expressed exasperation about recent personnel decisions.

“If decades of experience in uniform isn’t enough to lead the NSA but amateur isolationists can hold senior policy jobs at the Pentagon, then what exactly are the criteria for working on this Administration’s national security staff?” he said. “I can’t figure it out.”

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2025/04/07/shoshana-chatfield-nato-trump-dei/>

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Joint Task Force Empire Shield

PHOTOS: Armed soldier randomly attacked in Brooklyn (Photos)

New York Daily News, April 5, 2025 ::

Note: This is a series of 12 photos and captions taking on the spot on April 3 after Sgt. Joseph Bueno was attacked by an emotionally distrubed individual during an April 3 incident.

Caption:U.S. Army Joint Task Force Empire Shield Sgt. Bueno was injured after he and witnesses said he was body slammed to the roadway on Flatbush Ave. in Brooklyn, on Thursday, April 3, 2025, in an unprovoked attack by a man who was arrested at the scene.

Caption (for 11 photos): U.S. Army Joint Task Force Empire Shield Sgt. Bueno was injured after he and witnesses said he was body slammed to the roadway on Flatbush Ave., opposite Junior’s Cheesecake Factory, in Brooklyn, on Thursday,

April 3, 2025, in an unprovoked attack by a man who was arrested at the scene.
(Theodore Parisienne / New York Daily News)

<https://www.nydailynews.com/2025/04/05/photos-armed-soldier-randomly-attacked-in-brooklyn/>

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Unprovoked attacks in subway are front and center in NYC mayor's race

Gothamist April 7, 2025 ::

Note: This story mentions NYNG.

A rise in unprovoked attacks on subway riders since the COVID-19 pandemic has made concerns over public safety on mass transit a central — if not unavoidable — issue in New York City's mayoral race.

Candidates in the race are by and large drawing a direct line to subway crime with the city's stubbornly high homeless population who seek shelter in trains and stations. But the City Hall hopefuls vary on how to manage the crisis, with some calling to flood the system with police and others promising a historically large deployment of mental health professionals.

Subway safety is proving to be a key concern for New Yorkers this year. An Emerson College poll in March estimated 48% of registered city voters thought the subways were becoming less safe, compared to 32% who thought they were becoming safer. The topic has also drawn the attention of U.S. Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy, who on Friday took a brief subway ride with Mayor Eric Adams after threatening to withhold federal funding from the MTA unless officials submit a plan to address transit crime (the agency complied).

The NYPD reported 10 murders in the subway system in 2024, tying a record set in 2022 for the most in a calendar year since the department took control of transit policing in the mid-1990s. The subways saw 579 felony assaults last year, which also set a record. The city has over the last five years seen a string of straphangers randomly shoved onto subway tracks by people suffering with a mental illness. In January, a 23-year-old woman survived being pushed off a platform and in front of an A train in Washington Heights by a man who was later deemed mentally unfit to stand trial.

"Most of the people feel less safe," said Harlem resident Ben James, 38, after getting off a train at Union Square last week. "There are more homeless people who are on them 24 hours, seven days a week ... It's a mental health issue."

The mental health crisis is also apparent in NYPD crime data. While felony assaults are at historic levels in the subways last year, robberies fell to an eight-year low. Fritz Umbach, a criminologist at John Jay College, said that indicates riders are more likely to be subject to random attacks of “emotional violence” than “instrumental violence,” where they’re attacked for their property.

Nearly every candidate in the mayor’s race has proposed a solution.

Former Gov. Andrew Cuomo, who has led every mayoral poll since announcing his candidacy last month, has proposed hiring 1,500 additional cops to the NYPD transit bureau, which would boost its staffing levels by roughly 50%. His campaign claims the move would pay for itself by reducing overtime pay for subway patrols.

State Assemblymember Zohran Mamdani, a democratic socialist who has ranked second place to Cuomo in recent mayoral polls, has argued there are already enough police in the subways. He said the city needs other solutions to address transit crime and homelessness, and proposed the creation of a new city “Department of Community Safety.” He said the agency would cost \$1.1 billion a year to run, and would be charged with deploying more mental health outreach and violence interrupter teams into the transit system.

Adams — who last week announced plans to forgo the Democratic primary in June and run as an independent in November’s general election — has credited his administration for a 22% drop in major crime on the subway during the first three months of 2025. City Hall spokesperson Kayla Mamelak said the drop is “in spite of countless issues within our current criminal justice system, which has produced a revolving door of repeat offenders.”

Several candidates, including City Comptroller Brad Lander, state Sen. Zellnor Myrie as well as Cuomo, have supported the expansion of involuntary hospitalizations of mentally ill homeless people in the subways. The topic is also up for debate in Albany, where state lawmakers are mulling legislation that would expand limits on how long a person can be treated in medical facilities against their will.

“Case law now allows for removing people and taking them to the hospital,” said Kathy Wylde, the influential president of the nonprofit Partnership for New York City, which has lobbied for more involuntary removals of mentally ill homeless people from public spaces. “But the law does not explicitly provide for keeping people in hospital or in mandatory outpatient treatment beyond the point of crisis ... The law currently says you have to let them go.”

The focus on crime ahead of June’s mayoral primary echoes similar concerns during the 2021 race, when Mayor Eric Adams was elected on a platform that centered around public safety. Back then, city officials were still trying to coax riders back onto the subways after the pandemic all but shut down life across the five boroughs.

Just two weeks into Adams' first term, concerns over subway crime and homelessness reached new heights when Michelle Go, 40, was fatally shoved in front of a train at Times Square. The man charged with her murder was later deemed unfit to stand trial.

Adams' first three years in office were highlighted with initiatives launched alongside Gov. Kathy Hochul that aimed to make the subways safer for riders. The pair argued a safer transit would help the city's post-pandemic recovery. Adams and Hochul have since 2022 launched new initiatives to deploy special units of mental health workers and police officers to remove homeless people from subway stations. Adams has also directed hundreds more NYPD officers into the system, and Hochul last year deployed National Guard soldiers into stations.

But while ridership has rebounded from about 2.2 million per weekday in early 2022 to roughly 4 million today, the rate of violent crime in the subway system has remained higher than pre-pandemic levels.

That's opened a lane for candidates to campaign on subway crime, said Basil Smikle, a Columbia University professor and former executive director of the New York State Democratic Party.

"You're managing a couple of issues here: You're managing people's anxiety, you're managing the crime themselves, and you're trying to figure out if there is a common thread that if you focus resources on dealing with that, you might alleviate the problem as a whole," said Smikle. "It's always perception. Crime could be down, but if you don't feel safe, it's not down nearly enough."

MTA Chair Janno Lieber hammered home the relevance of subway crime and homelessness in the mayor's race during a forum at the 92nd Street Y last week, hinting he also supports the involuntary removals and hospitalizations of destitute people in the system.

"Some of it is the presence of folks who are struggling with mental illness, who are unpredictable and who do bad stuff unpredictably ... We have to get those people into a better situation," Lieber said. "The subway is no place for somebody with serious mental illness to be unmedicated, not being looked after."

<https://gothamist.com/news/unprovoked-attacks-in-subway-are-front-and-center-in-nyc-mayors-race>

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Naval Militia

Duty Calls: New York Naval Militia launching a drone unit

Times Union, April 7, 2025 ::

New York Naval Militia drone unit is about to become operational, according to Navy Petty Officer Stephanie Butler.

The Naval Militia is a state force of 3,200 sailors, Marines and Coast Guard personnel.

The six-member Unmanned Aerial Surveillance Unit took to the sky during a training exercise with its first drone at the Camp Smith Training Site, Cortlandt Manor.

Once the unit's drones become fully operational and the pilots are certified, the unmanned aircraft will enable the Naval Militia to better respond to natural disasters, search and rescue, recovery efforts and assist law enforcement missions, according to Staff Sgt. Christopher Vega of Peekskill, who recently became a certified unmanned remote pilot.

Vega recently completed the training and tests required to fly Vesper ISR drones, which are called UASs in military circles, according to Maj. Michael Golden of Ballston Lake, the officer in charge of the unit that was formed in 2023.

The first drone was purchased in 2024 at a cost of \$7,700, Golden said. The unit flies Vesper ISR, made by Vantage Robotics. That drone meets Department of Defense guidelines.

The unit's personnel first spent time crafting the personnel qualifications standards, or PQS, for the Unmanned Aerial Surveillance Unit, Golden said.

"Once the PQS was created, we could start boarding pilots and getting them qualified, making sure they are following all of the DMNA (Division of Military and Naval Affairs) regulations," he said.

Pilots must complete two stages of training. The prospective pilot must complete Part 107 of the remote pilot Federal Aviation Administration certification. Prospective pilots then must pass a 60-question FAA test. They then must complete PQS hands-on training and an additional two hours of flight time supervised by a UAS coordinator.

During the Camp Smith training, Vega successfully took the PQS test administered by Golden.

"I served as part of the development team and as the training staff noncommissioned officer in charge since July 2023," Vega said. "I have been instrumental in developing the unit's infrastructure and training programs."

Vega has been part of the organization since the beginning, he said.

“With the increasing prevalence of drone technology in civilian and military applications, the Naval Militia UAS Unit is poised to become an asset for the state of New York.”

The drone that Vega flies is equipped with a low-light thermal camera with a 48-times zoom capability and a three-axis stabilizing gimbal that transmits streaming video.

“With adequate funding and personnel, we can expand our capabilities to provide over watch for sensitive locations, disaster response and recover support, search and rescue assistance, enhanced support for local, county and state law enforcement and fire organizations,” Vega added.

The Naval Militia’s experience responding to storms in the past prompted the leadership to believe drone capability would be useful in the future, Golden said.

“Since Hurricane Irene in 2011, there were instances identified when having readily available aerial reconnaissance capability would have improved New York’s military forces,” he said.

Golden says there now is a goal to acquire more drone systems and to have two-man UAS detachments located across the state.

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

<https://www.timesunion.com/news/article/duty-calls-new-york-naval-militia-launching-20260545.php>

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New York Air National Guard

106th Rescue Wing: How a drill became a real battle to defend their base from Westhampton wildfire (Video also)

Newsday, April 11, 2025 :

Master Sgt. Barry Wood was onboard a military helicopter flying 2,000 feet above Long Island Sound when he recognized his destination — the New York Air National Guard 106th Rescue Wing in Westhampton Beach — where hundreds of his fellow airmen were training and in imminent danger.

"We saw the fire from our altitude and realized a pretty serious situation was developing at that moment," Wood said, referring to the March 8 blaze that scorched more than 400 acres of pine barrens parallel to Sunrise Highway. "We saw a giant plume ... It was way above our altitude."

Wood was one of several hundred Air National Guard reserve members of the 106th Rescue Wing participating in the base's monthly drill weekend on Saturday, March 8. While he was flying back to the base from upstate during a training assignment that afternoon, several Long Island fire departments had already begun battling a string of fires.

Hundreds of hands happened to be on deck for scheduled training the day of the fire, including those who joined Wood on his helicopter once it returned to the wing and airdropped 14,000 gallons of water on the Westhampton fire. That action, which Cannet said "accelerated containing" the fire, would have been delayed several hours if it were an ordinary day when only one or two dozen reserve members are present at the wing.

"If we weren't working that day, I'm not so sure the rest of this base might not have burned to the ground, I don't know," Cannet said. "I don't know how much they would have been able to stop it with ... winds blowing the fires. And we all saw what happened in California. Those fires can spread real quick. I think we were very fortunate that day that we had everybody here."

Following the fire, Senior Master Sgt. Michael Gadman, the chief of the rescue wing's fire department, has been coordinating with the New York State Forest Rangers to send some of his fire fighters upstate this summer for that agency's "refresher training for wild land fire fighting" in case another fire emergency happens, he said.

The wooded areas around Gabreski Airport, the location of the rescue wing, that did not burn last month certainly could catch fire, especially when high winds blow through parched bark. While he added that he wants his department to perform "almost identical" to their actions on March 8, which were "exactly the way they were trained," the courses will ensure the department is well-versed in communications procedures.

"One of the biggest things I want everyone to learn is command and control between ground forces and aviation assets," Gadman said.

Not a drill

Everyone participating in an ordinary drill weekend began to realize the 106th Rescue Wing was in the line of fire.

"The strong winds that day were kind of blowing the flames and the embers towards our installation so we felt directly threatened," Cannet said.

Around a quarter of the folks at the base were ordered to evacuate, according to the colonel, while several hundred reserve members remained to aid one of two efforts: the evacuation of people and aircraft from the base and fighting the fire.

The HH-60W Jolly Green II helicopter that brought Wood back to the rescue wing was the same bird used to drop water on the fire. A second one equipped with a necessary cargo hook for a bright orange water dropping device known as a Bambi Bucket was flown to MacArthur Airport along with a crew to keep it safe and in working order "in case the fire fighting went long and continued into the next day," said Master Sgt. Clifford Bould.

"It was a little bit chaotic at first, but it was nothing that we don't train for," he added. "We're always prepared to do whatever the mission requires."

Fire 'just turned orange'

While Bould and other reserve members were readying and protecting birds, Gadman was leading boots on the ground, first to areas along Sunrise Highway west of Old Riverhead Road around 1 p.m.

Winds exceeding 30 mph blew the flames southeast through the dry wooded area towards Old Riverhead Road. The firefighters relocated to that roadway to keep the fire from crossing over towards the Rescue Wing. The sign along the road recognizing the efforts of the firefighters who battled the notorious pine barrens wildfire of 1995 was surely invisible, as the fire crept 40 feet per minute, according to Gadman, reducing lush, full-bodied greenery to acres of charred stick figures.

"We just fought the fire all the way down the road as it was burning," Gadman said. "The fire actually went over our fire vehicles ... It just completely went blackout and just turned orange."

The base's firefighters were forced to retreat farther south, Gadman said. Around 2:30 p.m., they established a defensive line on North Perimeter Road, between the Long Island Practical Shooters Association to the north and Gabreski Airport hangars that house both civilian and Suffolk County Police Department aircraft to the south. Within the hour, firefighters were dealing with fires at the shooting range and the airport.

The shooting range stores ammunition, but the base's fire department identified other areas they needed to defend beyond the airport they knew would exacerbate the situation if they caught fire. As the wind shifted to a northeasterly direction around 4 p.m., firefighters headed east to the airfield's taxiway.

"The major concern in this area ... was a fireworks storage area with what we heard was 20,000 pounds of fireworks, and also a pool chemical storage facility with chlorine," Gadman said.

This was running through Wood's mind as he sat in the back of the wing's HH-60W.

"They could add more fuel sources and now send projectiles to residential areas, making this a lot worse," Wood said. "Luckily that didn't happen, but that was my primary concern ... We need to get to all this quickly so we can prevent this from becoming a catastrophic event."

When Wood returned to the base from training upstate at around 2 p.m., Lt. Col. James "Sunny" Liston, a pilot with the base's 101st Rescue Squadron, which operates the HH-60Ws, was waiting for him. Along with other reserve members, they took to the sky in the helicopter armed with a Bambi Bucket, which the base had not used in a mission capacity since the 1995 pine barrens fire.

Fighting fire from the sky

"When we first took off, you could see the smoke was basically covering the northeastern side of the base ... just a solid wall of smoke," Liston said. "It does kind of create its own environment, the turbulence, the heat, all kind of combines, plus the 30, 40 knot winds that we were dealing with already, that made for a pretty dynamic environment."

With each dive to around 10 feet above the Wildwood Lake in Northampton to scoop up around 500 gallons of water, Wood, wearing just a military, olive-green, zip-up flight suit, felt the wind and the splash back of the cold water, and with each assault on the fire, he felt the heat.

"It's a good shock to your system," he said.

Wildwood Lake in Riverhead as seen from an HH-60W Jolly Green II search and rescue helicopter with the 106th Rescue Wing Operations Group, which aided in fire suppression during the wildfires in the pine barrens on March 8, near the F.S. Gabreski Air National Guard Base in Westhampton Beach. Credit: Newsday/Steve Pfost

With limited visibility, Wood, who had his hands on the trigger that dropped the water, needed help coordinating each attack.

"I told my left ... my counterpart, give me a three second countdown and say 'drop, drop, drop.'"

After around five hours, the HH-60W made 28 trips from Wildwood Lake to the Westhampton blaze. In total, the air guard crew dumped more than 14,000 gallons of

water on the fire. The New York Army National Guard also launched three UH-60M Blackhawks from the Army Aviation Support Facility in Ronkonkoma, which charted a similar course and dropped an extra 28,380 gallons of water on the Westhampton fire.

Last week, reserve members who stand by for rescue missions across the country or even the world, were thankful their mission was successful and that they were able to help their local community.

"We work on these things everyday, and a lot of times it's just training," said Tech. Sgt. Nicholas Creedon. "But to actually be a part of ... a real mission in our backyard rather than in a deployed location ... it's awesome."

<https://www.newsday.com/long-island/suffolk/106th-rescue-wing-westhampton-fire-drill-lvt0ifzo>

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In Arctic conditions, RCAF air task force proves agile support (Photos)

SkiesMagazine, April 9, 2025 :

Note: This photo story includes the 109th Airlift Wing.

The Canadian Armed Forces recently hosted the largest Operation Nanook-Nunavut in the annual Arctic training event's history.

"As we look at agile employment of aircraft for the Air Force, being able to deploy to remote locations and run sustained operations, this was a huge proof of concept for us," observed LCol Steve Thompson, days after returning from the largest Operation Nanook-Nunavut the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) has hosted in the 17 years since the annual Arctic training event was first conducted in 2007.

Op Nanook is an all-domain defence and security operation that brings together Regular and Reserve elements from across the CAF, as well as international partners, to test combined and joint interoperability in a variety of sea and land-based scenarios and often under extreme conditions.

Thompson, the commanding officer of 440 Transport Squadron, based in Yellowknife, N.W.T., led an Air Task Force (ATF) of almost 150 personnel from across the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) and from the U.S. National Guard to support a wide range of missions in the vicinity of Inuvik and Beaufort Delta.

“For those units that don’t operate where we get to operate daily, it was a huge boost for them to know that they can come up into a harsh climate and get the job done,” he said. “The Arctic is not a scary place. It’s a place that, if you respect it, you can operate in comfortably.”

Over three weeks in late February and early March, as temperatures dipped at times below minus 50 degrees Celsius with the wind chill, the ATF aircrews, maintenance technicians and logistics personnel maintained an around-the-clock op tempo not previously recorded on Op Nanook.

Operating from the NORAD facility at the airport in Inuvik, the ATF featured a modest fleet of eight aircraft: two ski-equipped Twin Otters from 440 Squadron; two CH-146 Griffons from 430 Tactical Helicopter Squadron in Valcartier, Que.; two CH-147F Chinooks from 450 Tactical Helicopter Squadron in Petawawa, Ont.; a CH-146 Griffon from 417 Combat Support Squadron in Cold Lake, Alta.; and a LC-130 Hercules with skis from the 139th Airlift Squadron of the 109th Airlift Wing of the New York Air National Guard.

But over the course of Op Nanook, they flew 413 hours, conducting 184 missions that involved the movement of over 420 passengers and more than 210,000 pounds of freight.

Much of that was aided by a headquarters staff, mostly from 440 Squadron, as well as members from 436 and 429 Transport Squadrons in Trenton, Ont., 412 Transport Squadron in Ottawa, plus members from 8 Air Maintenance Squadron and 8 Operational Support Squadron in Trenton.

The missions, too, broke new ground, sling loading vehicles and moving large numbers of troops over challenging terrain.

The ATF’s seven lines of tasking began with finding an ideal location and then building a landing area on the ice on Parsons Lake for the LC-130 Ski Herc.

The Twin Otters concurrently provided airlift and route reconnaissance for the 1st Canadian Ranger Patrol Group, which conducted a patrol over a mountain pass from Tuktoyaktuk, N.W.T., to Old Crow in the eastern Yukon. The patrol was supported by regular food and supply bundle drops from a Twin Otter, and had a broken skidoo airlifted out by a Chinook.

The Griffon and Chinook helicopters provided support to the International Cooperation Engagement Program for Polar Research, a global team of about 25 military and civilian personnel performing experiments on clothing, weapons mounted on skidoos, and other equipment under Arctic conditions. Employing a HUSL (helicopter under slung load) net, the Griffons transported food, water, fuel and other supplies to a remote camp for almost two weeks.

“They were doing a lot of human factors testing as well, how the body reacts in extreme conditions, and with different clothing,” Thompson explained.

The testing also involved a new U.S. Army Cold Weather All-Terrain Vehicle (CATV), a newer variant of the Canadian Army’s BV-206.

The fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft also supported the Advanced Naval Capabilities Unit, a small team from the Royal Canadian Navy testing aerial and underwater drones, transporting people and resupplies of food, water, and other essentials to Reindeer Station — northwest of Inuvik on the Mackenzie River.

At the same time, the two helicopter fleets and the Twin Otters transported port inspection divers from the Naval Reserve and combat divers from the Army, as well as all their gear, for under ice operations near Tuktoyaktuk.

Working with the Canadian Special Operations Regiment (CSOR) from Petawawa, a CH-147F crew conducted the first-ever sling load operation of a BV-206, transporting the all-terrain vehicle from Tuktoyaktuk to Inuvik. The Chinooks also provided airlift for CSOR throughout their area of operations.

The largest mission task, though, involved the insertion of troops from 37 Canadian Brigade Group (CBG), reserve units from 5th Canadian Division. Employing both Chinooks and the Twin Otters, the ATF first inserted a platoon at Shingle Point — a site known as Bar-2 on the Distant Early Warning Line.

The Chinooks then moved a platoon of soldiers and skidoos to Bar C, or Tununuk Camp, where they then conducted a security patrol to a third DEW Line site.

On the last day of Op Nanook, the ATF moved a platoon from 37 CBG to Bar BA3 to conduct manoeuvres.

Arctic Adjustment

For 440 Squadron, there was minimal adjustment to meeting the needs of the overall mission tasks. Flying in their own backyard, Twin Otter aircrews were well acquainted with weather and terrain conditions.

For Ontario- and Alberta-based squadrons, it was an adjustment for them to operate where the treeline ends and reference points disappear in a white blanket of snow that offers few visual cues and can play havoc with depth perception.

“There’s really no contrast to be able to pick out land features,” Thompson noted. “That was a different experience for those that are used to flying in the south.”

The cold conditions and firm snow base, however, proved ideal for ski landings. “It was probably the best ski conditions we have seen in a long time,” he said.

“Everywhere [aircraft] needed to go, they were able to get into. The lakes and the ocean were not too severely drifted, so it wasn’t too bumpy. We got a lot of excellent flying and ski experience-building on this operation.”

Operating out of the NORAD facility in Inuvik, the ATF was able to keep its Griffon helicopters in a warm hangar overnight, while the Chinooks parked in a nearby “green hangar” acquired in 2024 by the federal government.

The shelters likely helped prevent some unserviceability issues, but the aircraft weathered the extreme with few problems, said Thompson.

“The maintenance crews knocked it out of the park. The whole time we were up there, they were working long hours anytime there was an unserviceability. The units were well prepared with their pack up kits and the maintenance teams they had, and they were normally able to turn maintenance tasks around relatively quickly so that the aircraft were back operating with a limited time away from my mission tasks.”

The operation highlights included an early evening redeployment of members of CSOR and 50,000 pounds of equipment with just two Chinooks, and the integration of the medium-lift helicopters with the Twin Otters to insert 37 Brigade.

The most consequential for the ATF, though, was building the landing area on Parsons Lake.

“The normal process to build a ski landing area takes around two weeks to pioneer a site, build a camp, and groom the strip — depending on snow conditions. This year we completed that process in just over three days,” said Thompson. “The Polar Camp Skiway team and Ski Landing Area Control Officer team knocked it out of the park. Following the successful landings of the LC-130 Ski Herc, the teams had the camp packed up and off the ice in an afternoon, which is also an incredible feat.

“It was also an excellent proof of concept, because it was the first time ever that the LC-130 landed on freshwater ice. They are used to operating on sea ice, so this was a huge milestone for them, because it opened up a whole new operating area for them.”

While the tactical helicopter squadrons frequently train and operate together, and 440 Squadron has worked often with the 109th Airlift Wing, bringing all the assets together under an ATF — especially the combat support squadron — is rare, Thompson said.

“It was the largest Air Task Force we’ve ever had on Op Nanook — probably the busiest Air Task Force we’ve had — and everyone just got it done,” he told Skies. “Not to sound cliché, but it was truly a Canadian thing where we took all these challenges, put our heads down, and the whole team pushed through it.”

<https://skiesmag.com/features/in-arctic-conditions-rcaf-air-task-force-proves-agile-support/>

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New York Army National Guard

N.Y. National Guard, Swedish allies compete for 'Best Warrior' title (video)

Spectrum News 1, April 10, 2025 :

Giving it your best shot: that's what New York National Guards members are doing at the Best Warrior Competition. They're squaring off with Swedish service members in a friendly clash.

Native New Yorker Sgt. Alexandro Dierdonne says he was eager to enter for the first time.

"It is definitely a goal to strive for winning the best work," he said. "Competition means a lot to myself and my unit. It would be an honor to bring back the title of Best Warrior to back to my unit."

It's a weeklong struggle, with one of the final events being a marksmanship challenge. Command Sgt. Maj. Edwin Garris, who oversees the competition, says it tests the ability to perform under stress.

"The stress on this one is the timing," he said. "The timing is so short, but you got to be accurate. You've got to be able to go from the holster, aim and shoot and in a very limited time."

It's also a great chance to build camaraderie with fellow servicemen and women.

"Inspire them to want to go back and say, 'Hey, we need to train with these elements, we need the U.S. to come here and us to go there,'" Garris said. "Continue to collaborate and build those bridges on our countries as true allies."

Dierdonne says there's a lot to learn from his Swedish comrades.

"You always are curious about different cultures," he said. "So, you ask them what they do. What do they eat? What do they say? How do they train? Those conversations go back and forth for minutes, even sometimes hours, when you're out in the field."

<https://spectrumlocalnews.com/nys/central-ny/news/2025/04/10/national-guard-best-warrior-competition-sweden>

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Army cites glaring failures in drone attack that killed U.S. troops

Washington Post, April 7, 2025 ::

Note: New York Army National Guard Soldiers assigned to the 101st Expeditionary Signal Battalion were injured in this attack.

An investigative report obtained by The Post details how Iranian-backed militants evaded detection at a remote outpost in Jordan.

A drone attack that killed three U.S. soldiers in Jordan last year was most likely preventable, according to a military investigation that determined that numerous failures — from complacency and indecisiveness to outright negligence — contributed to the worst assault on American troops since the fall of Afghanistan.

The small outpost, known as Tower 22, is along Jordan's border with Syria and Iraq, and largely had been spared from the assaults on American positions in those countries by Iranian proxies furious with the United States for its support of Israel's war in the Gaza Strip. However, on the morning of Jan. 28, 2024, while most of the base's 350 troops slept, there were indications an attack might be imminent, Army investigators learned.

An intelligence report transmitted to Tower 22 approximately 90 minutes before the strike warned that militia groups had discussed openly on social media their intent to target U.S. forces in the area, prompting Tower 22's second-in-command to tell the watch team to "stay vigilant." But when their radar picked up an unknown object heading toward the base, no one assessed it as a threat — and, vitally, no one issued an order for everyone to take cover, the investigation found.

Four minutes later, a powerful explosion throttled the base's living quarters.

Oneida Oliver-Sanders, whose 24-year-old daughter, Sgt. Kennedy Sanders, was killed in the attack, told The Washington Post that when Army officials explained the investigation to her family, they were thorough and forthright about the lapses that were found. She said she was encouraged to learn there were other troops who braved danger to help, but disturbed that the attack drone was allowed to breach the base's defenses.

“They did have time to alert them to take cover, and because of poor judgment, they didn’t,” Oliver-Sanders said.

Also killed in the blast were Staff Sgt. William Jerome Rivers, 46, and Sgt. Breonna Alexsondria Moffett, 23. More than 70 personnel were wounded, some seriously.

This account is based on the voluminous report detailing the Tower 22 investigation, a copy of which was obtained by The Post via the Freedom of Information Act; interviews with the slain soldiers’ survivors; and a separate summary of the findings the military provided to them. The report is more than 4,500 pages, though the Army withheld more than half of it and redacted much of the material it released.

The incident is the only deadly strike on U.S. troops since Iranian-backed militants unleashed their campaign of violence in response to the Gaza war. The Pentagon rushed additional defenses to the region to shore up protections for deployed service members, but Tower 22, a support base for another American outpost nearby in Syria, was deemed to be at lower risk of attack, officials have said.

The investigation’s findings appear to have some contradictions. For instance, investigators faulted Tower 22’s leaders for failing to “visualize risk” and not appreciating the likelihood of an attack.

Yet commanders above them also failed to envision the base’s vulnerability. Four months before the attack, Army Central, which oversees operations throughout the Middle East, denied a request for an air defense system capable of shooting down drones because, investigators found, only one such system was available and troops in the United States needed it to prepare for deployments. A request for a radar system that could better detect drones also was denied, the report said.

The only counter-drone defenses at Tower 22 were electronic warfare systems designed to disable the aircraft or disrupt their path to a target, according to the investigation and previous reporting by The Post.

A spokesperson for Army Central did not respond to repeated requests for additional information, including regarding who at Army Central denied Tower 22’s appeal for an air defense system.

The Sanders family was told that four officers faced disciplinary action as a result of the attack. The investigation does not identify them or detail what their punishment was.

The attack

While senior military leaders determined there was less risk facing Tower 22, soldiers posted there would later report increasing unease. In October, a drone was brought

down outside the base perimeter, and smaller reconnaissance drones were seen nearby in subsequent weeks but troops struggled to detect or disable them.

Sanders, Rivers and Moffett belonged to an engineering unit responsible for reinforcing Tower 22's defenses. Rivers, an experienced noncommissioned officer, helped oversee electrical work. Moffett and Sanders operated heavy machinery such as bulldozers and excavators.

The day before the attack was spent preparing for construction projects. After dinner, Sanders and Moffett went to a tent to partake in one of the few luxuries of a Middle East deployment: playing a few rounds of "Call of Duty."

After 1 a.m., they retired to the spartan housing unit they shared. While they slept, the night crew in the Base Defense Operations Center, or BDOC, monitored intelligence streams and the facility's air defense systems. At one point, a laser was pointed at Tower 22 from Rukban, a camp less than two miles away housing thousands of displaced Syrians.

Just past 4 a.m., Tower 22 received the report that a Telegram channel affiliated with local militias had posted about plans for a drone attack, the investigation says.

At 5:30 a.m., troops in the operations center watched as a U.S. drone finished a surveillance flight. A minute later, the screen pinged, showing an unknown object approaching Tower 22 from the south, but the watch team — and a powerful surveillance camera — was focused on the friendly drone as it came in to land, the report says.

At 5:35 a.m., the investigation says, a low whirring sound, like a lawn mower, could be heard — and then a fiery blast.

A leader, who is not identified in the report, burst into the BDOC and screamed, "How did you guys not see it?" the report says. The call was sounded for everyone to take cover, and people raced barefoot to the bunkers as shrapnel and other debris rained down.

Once the all-clear was given, personnel rushed to the wreckage to look for survivors, pushing through their own injuries and with the threat that more attack drones could be on the way.

Rivers was killed on impact and buried in rubble, the report says. The force of the explosion propelled Sanders onto the roof of her housing unit. She and Moffett were unresponsive and taken to the surgical station, which was overwhelmed with patients. Physicians tried to resuscitate Moffett, but the crush of wounded personnel forced them to move on to troops they felt they could save, the report says.

A “vampire” call was announced over the loudspeaker, and service members lined up to donate blood. It was an urgent and dangerous moment. Sometime later, another drone approached and was shot down by an air defense system at the Tanf Garrison, a U.S. base 13 miles away in Syria, the report says.

The base chaplain administered final rites to Sanders, Moffett and Rivers, and fellow service members guarded their remains before a helicopter arrived to evacuate them.

Problems exposed

The Army’s investigation places significant blame on the operations center’s leadership and crews. The attack was allowed to happen because of their “failure to interrogate or assess the unidentified aircraft” that pinged on the radar, the investigation concluded.

Troops monitoring for incoming threats told investigators that they did not see the drone on their screens, describing instead two objects they assessed were birds or too far away to be a concern.

Yet when there was an opportunity to alert base personnel to a possible threat, there was confusion among troops in the operations center about roles and responsibilities, the investigation found. The night shift was considered the most likely period an attack could occur, but an enlisted leader, rather than an officer, was in charge and as a result the crew “did not feel fully empowered to make important decisions,” the report says, “even when faced with imminent danger to the base.”

Leaders at Tower 22 also failed to implement proper training, and the base’s battle drills were “inadequate,” investigators determined.

Service members told investigators that watching the friendly drone land may have distracted them from scrutinizing the unknown object. The militants also may have anticipated that the landing was a moment the base had limited views of inbound threats and programmed their attack drone to strike about the same time.

Other factors included “cumulative exhaustion” among the night crew and radars that don’t classify whether incoming objects are drones. In response, Army officials reduced the night shift from 12 to eight hours, assigned more leadership to the base and conducted more training.

Francine Moffett told The Post that she was comforted to learn her daughter received final rites, but overcome by the thought that she could not hold her in her last moments. She said she struggles to recall much from the Army’s briefing.

“When you say her name, and say deceased, you can’t hear anything else,” Moffett said.

Her daughter's legacy has endured, though. Breonna Moffett was a reservist and, when not fulfilling her Army duties, worked at a treatment center for cerebral palsy, which created an award in her honor.

Shawn Sanders, Kennedy Sanders's father, said he and his wife were heartened by the dedication of her fellow troops who ensured their daughter's remains were protected, though he acknowledged it was difficult to accept the failures investigators found.

"It's beyond frustrating to know four minutes elapsed and human error allowed this to take place," he said.

His daughter was full of potential and planned to study radiology, he explained, and after her death, their community in Waycross, Georgia, came together to support the family.

Today, a section of their street has a new name: Kennedy L. Sanders Way.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2025/04/06/jordan-drone-attack-tower-22/>

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State Partnership Program

Konkret kompanjonskap med nationalgardet (Concrete partnership with the National Guard)

Forsvarsmakten, April 9, 2025 (Swedish military publication):

NOTE: this story was translated using Google Translates.

Since the SPP agreement was signed last summer, the Swedish Armed Forces have received several visits from the New York National Guard – most recently Major General Michel Natali and a delegation, who took a special interest in the Swedish Armed Forces' ability to cross waterways.

"This is the starting point for a connection with the Swedish Army. We have already identified common areas where we can together increase our joint preparedness," says Major General Natali.

The American visit took place within the framework of the State Partnership Program, SPP, which specifically means that an American state's National Guard and a selected country's armed forces are linked together to build relationships that aim to

increase the parties' respective capabilities. For the Swedish Armed Forces, this meant cooperation with "The Empire State", i.e. the state of New York and its National Guard, with approximately 16,000 soldiers.

Mutual lessons learned

Much of the cooperation consists of exchanging skills. One such skill that the Göta Engineer Regiment is a master at is crossing watercourses, what is called wet gap crossing in military English – absolutely crucial for, for example, a mechanized brigade that wants to advance in the Nordic countries. That is why the American delegation visited Dalälven, where Ing 2 practiced precisely this.

– In our state we have an engineer battalion but without paving capabilities. Our engineers mainly work horizontally, they build roads and clear obstacles. We can also build vertical installations, but if you combined what we can do and what the Göta Engineer Regiment does, it would complement each other, says Major General Natali.

Strengthened collaboration

During the visit, Major General Natali also met with Deputy Chief of Army Staff Per Nilsson for discussions about Sweden's first year in NATO and how the army will double in size. Continued and deepened cooperation between the army and the National Guard was also discussed.

– Sweden is NATO's newest member and I feel that our cooperation will only strengthen Sweden's integration in the future, concludes Natali.

<https://www.forsvarsmakten.se/sv/aktuellt/2025/04/konkret-kompanjonskap-med-nationalgardet/>

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Veterans

Local Army Veterans Acquire Pella Windows & Doors of Connecticut-New York

Door and Window Market.com,. April 10, 2025t :

Yonah Group, led by Army veterans Michael Maniaci and Miles Kirwin, recently announced the acquisition of the Pella Windows & Doors distributorship serving Connecticut and parts of New York, known as Pella CT-NY. The transaction marks a

“strategic” investment in the region’s home improvement market and reflecting a surge in veteran-led business acquisitions, Yonah Group officials said.

Maniaci and Kirwin met in 2014 as students at the U.S. Army Ranger School. After leading soldiers in complex environments, both went on to build careers in the private sector—Maniaci as a building products investment banker at Credit Suisse and Raymond James, and Kirwin as a management consultant at Deloitte and chief of staff at a tech startup. Kirwin also continues to serve in the New York Army National Guard.

Company officials say the two are part of a growing cohort of veterans using the “search fund” model to acquire and operate established businesses with long-term potential. The duo is also from the region: Kirwin grew up between Westchester and Litchfield Counties, and Maniaci is a West Point graduate.

“We’ve spent our careers leading teams in high-stress environments. Now we’re channeling that experience into building a customer-first, locally-owned business,” said Kirwin, co-owner of Pella CT-NY.

“This is more than a business—it’s a platform to create great jobs, serve the community, and deliver industry leading products from the top window and door brand in the U.S.,” said Maniaci, co-owner of Pella CT-NY. “We’re investing in talent, technology, and training to make Pella CT-NY the top choice in the market.”

Pella CT-NY serves homeowners, builders and architects across Connecticut and New York’s Westchester, Putnam and Dutchess Counties.

The acquisition marks a successful transition for longtime owner-operator Desmond Rea, who spent decades growing Pella CT-NY.

“After many years of building this business with an incredible team, it was important to find the right successors—people with integrity, grit, and a long-term vision,” said Rea. “From the moment I met Michael and Miles, I knew they were the right fit to lead Pella CT-NY into its next chapter.”

Pella Corp. was founded in 1925. The CT-NY branch will continue to operate independently as an exclusive distributor, supported by Pella’s national resources and product innovation.

<https://www.dwmmag.com/2025/04/10/local-army-veterans-acquire-pella-windows-doors-of-connecticut-new-york/>

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Paramedic and veteran Matt Sullivan launches bid for Tompkins County Legislature

Fingerlakes Daily News, April 7, 2025::

Note: The individual running for office is a NYARNG veteran.

Matt Sullivan, a paramedic, union leader, and Army veteran, has announced his candidacy for the Tompkins County Legislature, aiming to bring urgent attention to emergency services, childcare, and local job development.

A lifelong Danby resident and graduate of Ithaca High School, Sullivan has built his career around service—first as a combat medic with the New York Army National Guard, then as a paramedic with Bangs Ambulance. His leadership experience includes deployment in Iraq and Kuwait, where he earned the Army Commendation Medal, and later founding Bangs Ambulance Workers United, a CSEA-affiliated union, where he now serves as president.

In his campaign launch, Sullivan highlighted three key priorities: improving rural emergency medical services, expanding childcare access, and strengthening workforce and economic opportunities across Tompkins County.

Emergency response gaps, particularly in Danby, are central to Sullivan’s platform. Some 35 percent of calls receive no initial response, and wait times regularly exceed 20 minutes. “Cardiac arrests are almost guaranteed to be fatal after eight minutes,” the campaign noted, underscoring the need for faster, more reliable EMS support.

On childcare, Sullivan pointed to a stark mismatch between need and availability. More than 400 children under age five live in Danby and Caroline, yet only 162 childcare slots exist for children under 12. With average costs exceeding \$16,000 a year—over 20 percent of a typical family’s income—he says expanding options is critical. He plans to seek funding from the state’s \$110 million Childcare Construction Fund to build and upgrade local facilities.

Sullivan also stressed the importance of economic resilience in light of cutbacks at major employers like BorgWarner and the Cargill Salt Mine. He supports broader access to union jobs and wants to reform the Tompkins County Workforce Development Board to offer better pathways into skilled trades. He also backs tax incentives for small businesses that hire local workers and supports diversifying beyond the healthcare and education sectors.

Although this is his first campaign for public office, Sullivan has already been active in regional policy, serving on the Regional EMS Council since 2023.

He and his wife, Krissy—who works as a nurse practitioner at Cayuga Medical Center—returned to Danby in 2020 to raise their family. They now live in West Danby with their young son, Daniel.

Sullivan says his campaign will focus on listening to the community and taking action based on what residents need. His message is simple: no one should have to leave Tompkins County to find quality care, a stable job, or a safe home.

https://www.fingerlakes1.com/2025/04/07/paramedic-and-veteran-matt-sullivan-launches-bid-for-tompkins-county-legislature/#google_vignette

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