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DOCCS Support

Prison Staffing Woes Leave Thousands Stuck in County Jails

New York Focus, Sept. 2, 2025 ::

After a strike led state prisons to stop accepting new prisoners, local jails have been left holding thousands of extra people.

The New York state prison system has been running on fumes since its corrections officers walked off the job in February. The three-week wildcat strike ended with the prison agency firing some 15 percent of its guards, while other officers resigned or retired early, grinding prison operations to a halt. Despite a thousands-strong National Guard force deployed to assist remaining staff, facilities have canceled or cut back on programming and recreation, stripping incarcerated people of educational and work opportunities and leaving many lingering — and baking — in their cells and dorms for upwards of 20 hours a day.

What's the difference between prisons and jails?

Jails are local facilities that mostly house people awaiting trial and those sentenced to a year or less for relatively minor crimes. Prisons are state or federal facilities that generally house people sentenced to more than a year of incarceration.

In New York, jails are run by county sheriffs. (The one exception is New York City, whose jails are run by the city Department of Correction.) Most of New York's prisons are state institutions run by the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision.

Now, over five months after the strike's conclusion, New York's prison system is trying to prevent its ongoing crisis from trickling down to the local level: Jails have had to hold

thousands of people meant to be in prison, leading to difficulties staffing housing areas, running programs, and paying for the influx.

At issue is a jam in the jail-to-prison pipeline. Amid February's chaos, the state prison agency stopped accepting new prisoners. That left local jails, which hold people who haven't yet been sentenced to prison time, to pick up the slack and hold people technically serving state time.

The prison system resumed intakes for all facilities in May, but progress tackling the backlog has been slow. In July, jails across the state held eight times as many so-called "state-ready" people on average as they did in 2024, a New York Focus analysis of data released last week shows.

Jail capacity varies widely across the state, and some counties have been well equipped to handle the backlog. The Montgomery County Sheriff's Office told New York Focus that it has had no problems housing the increased population. The Cayuga County Sheriff's Office complained of increased costs and space issues during the height of the backlog, but reported that the number of state readies it houses has almost returned to normal.

Western New York's Chautauqua County, on the other hand, is struggling to keep up. Sheriff James Quattrone told New York Focus at the beginning of August that the uptick in his jail's population has made it difficult to find enough tablets that incarcerated people use to call loved ones and meeting space for programming. His department has had to cancel some programs as a result, he said.

Quattrone complained about the heightened population's effects on staff. The jail has had to open up additional housing units, which requires more officers, leading to "many hours of forced overtime," he wrote in an email. That, in turn, has led to more staffing issues: "When we see forced overtime we also see more use of sick time," he said. (The prison system may be experiencing the same problem: In a court filing in July, one prison reported that roughly 100 of its fewer than 600 officers were calling out sick every day.)

Last month, the sheriff's office in Erie County, home to Buffalo, told New York Focus that its incarcerated population was at its highest level in nearly six years, predominantly due to 164 state readies — 15 times more than the daily average last year. The office complained that officers have to work more overtime.

The backlog has also been a financial burden, the Erie County Sheriff's Office said. The increased jail population "was not an issue that could have been contemplated when we developed our 2025 budget," a spokesperson said in a statement. If an incarcerated person spends more than 10 days in a county jail after they're sentenced to state prison, the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) reimburses the county \$100 a day to house them, the sheriff's office said. "This is not

sufficient to cover the true cost for many of them, particularly those on expensive medications,” the spokesperson wrote.

A new 308-bed jail in Dutchess County, meanwhile, saw its average June population rise to 90 percent capacity, driven in part by a state-ready population seven times higher than last year’s normal.

It’s uncommon for jails to operate near full capacity, as most need wiggle room to separate people of different genders, health and legal statuses, and security classifications. The Dutchess County sheriff, who did not respond to requests for comment, has said his jail needs to keep about 10 percent of beds vacant to comply with state regulations. Dutchess County’s average state-ready jail population dropped by 17 percent from June to July, but the new facility still had an average of only 13 percent of its beds to spare.

In April, the New York City jail system reopened a decommissioned facility on Rikers Island and started housing some men at a women’s jail to deal with the backlog of state-ready incarcerated people. Five months later, the embattled jail complex continues to house hundreds more state readies than it’s used to: a daily average of 590 in August, according to numbers compiled by the Data Collaborative for Justice at John Jay College. That’s eight times more than the 2024 daily average for New York City jails.

City and state officials have called attention to harm the overcrowding has had on Rikers, which recently came under federal receivership after years of deadly dysfunction. City councilmembers penned a letter to Governor Kathy Hochul highlighting safety issues at Rikers and urging the state to take care of the backlog. DOCCS has assured city officials that it has increased its intake pace to the point where it is housing more new prisoners than the courts are sentencing to prison time.

DOCCS is working to relieve the pressure on local jails even as prisons continue to experience a crisis driven, in the department’s telling, by a severe post-strike shortage in officers. While DOCCS has launched an aggressive recruitment campaign, boosting its security ranks is a long-term process: The prison agency reported employing even fewer corrections officers, sergeants, and lieutenants at the beginning of this month than it did at the beginning of May, the earliest date for which post-strike numbers are available.

Advocates have called on DOCCS and Hochul to mitigate staffing issues by releasing more people from prison. Last month, over 130 groups sent a letter to Hochul calling on the governor to use her clemency power to release incarcerated people early and support legislation to reform the parole system.

“There are so many people inside ready to come home and contribute positively to their communities — and many of us out here ready to welcome them and support their return,” said Nick Encalada-Malinowski, civil rights campaign director for VOCAL-NY.

As of last month, the prison system remained nearly 2,600 officers down from just before the strike. Many programs remain canceled and incarcerated people get precious few hours outside of their cells and dorms.

“DOCCS appreciates the patience and understanding of all the counties and NYC DOC as we recover, recruit, and rebuild,” the department said in a statement.

<https://nysfocus.com/2025/09/02/county-jails-prison-guard-strike>

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Federal Government

Trump Crime Strategy May Work for Now, but Not for Long, Experts Say

NewYork Times, August 31, 2025 ::

Note: This item is provided for your information.

In the days since the president deployed hundreds of National Guard troops and federal agents to patrol city streets, crime has continued to drop in Washington. The question is whether the trend will last.

Local politicians, along with people who study crime for a living, say probably not.

In Washington, local elected officials have called President Trump’s deployment of the National Guard to fight street crime a power grab — just a temporary show of force unlikely to produce any durable reductions in crime, since leaving hundreds of troops on the ground indefinitely is unsustainable.

“The reason that surges are not particularly effective, and are generally disfavored by crime researchers and others who look at this stuff for a living, is because it’s a resource-intensive way of temporarily reducing crime,” said Thomas Abt, director of the Center for the Study and Practice of Violence Reduction. “If it does in fact reduce crime, that doesn’t address any of the underlying conditions.”

If the president is interested in long-term solutions, experts suggested a number of other ways the federal government could help drive down crime rates in a more lasting

way, from funds for training and recruitment for local officers to ideas that are less obviously focused on crime. One is something Mr. Trump himself has already floated: a \$2 billion spending project to spruce up Washington's public spaces, including fixing sidewalks, improving parks and adding new streetlights.

"It's going to be beautiful, all those lightbulbs," Mr. Trump told reporters recently.

Lightbulbs actually do have a role to play in cutting down on street crime. Lighting up dark spaces, planting grass on vacant lots, refurbishing abandoned homes and otherwise fixing up the city landscape are widely seen as simple and effective ways for cities to reduce gun violence, backed by studies in Flint, Mich., and Philadelphia.

Urban spaces that are well lit, with pleasant places to gather, mean there are more eyes on the street watching for trouble. They also promote tighter community ties among neighbors, preventing violent episodes. The idea is not dissimilar to older ideas about combating crime, known as the "broken windows" theory, which focused on cleaning up streets and cracking down on disorder. But one difference is that the older model was often coupled with policing tactics that have since been criticized as discriminatory.

The president's plan to beautify the capital would be a welcome component of an earnest crime-fighting strategy, researchers say. But it would have to include the parts of the city where most of the gun violence and other crime occurs, not just the areas around the White House and the Mall that Mr. Trump has promised to beautify.

"If he did that, that could be helpful," said Jens Ludwig, an economist and director of the University of Chicago Crime Lab. "Just because Trump proposes it does not mean that it is necessarily a bad idea and a contradiction of evidence."

Mr. Trump has suggested his takeover of the Washington police and deployment of the National Guard to the city is a dress rehearsal of sorts for an influx of federal officers and soldiers onto the streets of other major cities, with Chicago likely up next. He has portrayed American cities as dystopian hellscape even as violent crime has declined sharply in recent years after a surge during the coronavirus pandemic.

But Mr. Trump's diagnosis of crime as a major issue in the country resonates with many Americans, including scholars who say that while crime may be down the country still suffers from unacceptable levels of violence, especially compared with other developed countries. Many people in Washington, though dismayed by the president's approach, agree that more should be done to reduce the city's crime levels.

The problem is that "it's not an earnest effort" by the president to actually reduce crime, said Peter Moskos, a professor at John Jay College of Criminal Justice and former police officer in Baltimore.

Mr. Moskos said the federal government could do a number of things if it wanted to help cities lower crime. It could boost funding for grants to recruit more police officers, help clear more cases by dealing with backlogs in testing rape kits and DNA samples, and build national training facilities for the police.

“There’s so much that could be centralized,” he said. “But no one seems to be serious about this.”

Other experts said the federal government could increase funding for the Community Oriented Policing Services, or COPS, office within the Department of Justice. The program began under President Clinton as part of the 1994 crime bill, and for the last three decades has disbursed grants for hiring new officers and for crime and violence prevention programs, although its budget this fiscal year of \$437 million is much smaller than it was in the late 1990s, when it was more than \$1 billion.

The Trump administration plans to cut the office’s budget further — although it will boost COPS’s grants for hiring new officers by about \$50 million — and consolidate it within a different agency at the Department of Justice.

Another solution Mr. Moskos suggested would be for the federal government to make data collecting more timely and comprehensive, which would help local officials better understand the problem.

Karoline Leavitt, the White House press secretary, on Thursday touted data that shows crime has declined in Washington since the president sent soldiers and federal agents into the streets, and defended the president’s strategy.

“The numbers prove the president’s bold actions to make D.C. safe and beautiful again are working, just like he said they would,” she told reporters.

In girding for the possible deployment of the National Guard to his city, Mayor Brandon Johnson of Chicago has said that if the federal government wanted to help the city improve public safety it would restore the hundreds of millions of dollars in funding for community violence prevention groups that President Trump has cut. These groups help mediate disputes, mentor at-risk youths, and provide substance abuse treatment, mental health support and job assistance.

“There are many things the federal government could do to help us reduce crime and violence in Chicago, but sending in the military is not one of them,” Mayor Johnson has said.

Michel Moore, the former police chief of Los Angeles, said he worried that Mr. Trump’s actions on crime will make communities less safe because federal law enforcement may end up in conflict with the local police, damaging relationships that in the past have been important in tackling big cases, like organized crime and terrorism. He said

deploying federal agents for low-level immigration enforcement or to walk the streets of Washington takes them away from more serious crime.

“I don’t see that as being in our best interest,” he said. He said he wished the federal government would help local agencies fight crime by boosting grants. “There are funding opportunities galore for local law enforcement,” he said. “Whether it be equipment, technology, staffing.”

And he said the recent cuts to community groups are particularly alarming, saying he saw the benefits from his time as chief in Los Angeles. The groups often helped to “de-escalate tensions in neighborhoods and in many instances stop the retaliatory shootings, the back-and-forth,” he said.

David M. Kennedy, a criminologist at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, said there is a growing body of evidence that reducing gun violence requires a sustained focus on the handful of places where it concentrates. He said that in cities seeing the most significant decreases in crime, like Philadelphia and Baltimore, officials are using a scalpel, not a dragnet.

In other words, the opposite of the approach taken by Mr. Trump in Washington.

“Everything in crime strategy is about focus on the people and places that drive crime,” said Adam Gelb, the president of the Council on Criminal Justice, a nonpartisan research organization. “And the current deployment seems to be casting a very wide and unfocused net.”

The approach Mr. Kennedy has developed — often called “focused deterrence” — involves a coordinated effort by law enforcement, city officials, community groups and social services. They select individuals who are considered high risk for violence, then meet with them and offer services and counseling. They also warn them that they will be arrested and prosecuted if the warnings are not heeded.

Mr. Kennedy said that many of the community violence groups whose funding was recently cut have played important roles in expanding this strategy in American cities.

“The current administration’s cuts will do enormous damage to that institutionalization and that movement, and can absolutely be expected to cost lives,” he said.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/08/31/us/trump-crime-strategy-solutions.html>

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What to know about Trump threat to deploy National Guard troops in U.S. cities

Newsday, August 29, 2025 ::

Note: This article is provided for your information.

President Donald Trump is threatening to send National Guard troops into major American cities, including New York, to quell violence and potential civil disturbances.

But Gov. Kathy Hochul and NYPD Commissioner Jessica Tisch have argued that deploying the National Guard — as Trump did in Washington, D.C., after declaring a "crime emergency" — in New York is unnecessary.

Here's everything you need to know about what Trump is considering, and what city and state officials could do to stop him.

What is the National Guard and what do they typically do?

The National Guard is the primary combat reserve of the Army and Air Force, comprising more than 430,000 civilian soldiers who can respond to both domestic crises, such as natural disasters, and overseas conflicts, such as Afghanistan.

The majority of National Guard members serve in the states in which they live, often in a part-time role, generally while holding civilian jobs or attending school.

National Guard units are typically activated by the governors of their respective states to respond to state-level emergencies. But in certain cases — such as their recent deployment in California in response to immigration protests — they can be federalized by the president.

The Washington, D.C., National Guard, which was deployed this month to reduce crime, patrol national monuments and to beautify the district, is solely under federal control. That deployment comes from D.C. and six GOP-led states: Louisiana, Ohio, Mississippi, South Carolina, Tennessee and West Virginia.

Do National Guard members carry weapons and can they make arrests?

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth signed an order this month, allowing Guard members deployed to D.C. to carry service-issued weapons, including M17 pistols and M4 rifles.

While they will not conduct arrests, Guardsmen have the authority to temporarily detain individuals until other law enforcement arrive, Defense officials said.

What has Trump suggested about federalizing National Guard troops in New York and other Democratic-led cities?

Trump said he's considering sending National Guard troops to major U.S. cities that he contends, often in the face of evidence to the contrary, have uncontrollable violence.

"You look at Chicago, how bad it is. You look at Los Angeles, how bad it is," Trump said this month. "We have other cities that are very bad. New York has a problem. And then you have, of course, Baltimore and Oakland."

On Monday, Trump signed an executive order formalizing a specialized unit within the D.C. National Guard "dedicated to ensuring public safety and order in the nation's capital" and directing each state's Army National Guard and Air National Guard units to be trained, organized and be ready to be deployed to quell "civil disturbances."

What do New York officials think of Trump's suggestion that he could deploy National Guard troops to patrol the streets of the Big Apple?

During a news conference Tuesday, Hochul told reporters that she'd recently spoken with Trump to argue against a National Guard deployment.

"I said 'Mr. President, I can give you all the data you need to show that crime is down,' " said Hochul, who in 2024 deployed the National Guard to patrol the city subways during a crime wave. "It's working. Our policies are working. NYPD is doing their job."

A Hochul spokesman Thursday declined to say how the governor would respond if Trump deployed the Guard.

On Monday, Tisch told U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi there was no need for the administration to send the National Guard to New York.

"I don't see the need for it," Mayor Eric Adams added of a potential Guard deployment.

Can Trump ignore Hochul's recommendation and is there anything New York can do to stop them?

National security experts said if Trump wants to send National Guard troops to New York, Chicago or elsewhere, there's little that city and state officials can do to stop him, outside of filing a lawsuit after the fact, as was done in California.

A provision in Title 10 of the U.S. Code allows the sitting president to call National Guard members into federal service under certain circumstances, including to repel an "invasion" or if there is a "rebellion or danger of a rebellion against the authority of the government."

Trump also has the ability to invoke the Insurrection Act of 1807, which authorizes the president to deploy military forces, such as the National Guard, inside the United States to suppress rebellion or to enforce law in certain situations.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom filed a lawsuit after Guard troops were deployed in his state in June, arguing they were illegally engaged in civilian law enforcement. Trump's lawyers insist the National Guard didn't engage in any civil law enforcement.

The case is still pending.

<https://www.newsday.com/long-island/president-donald-trump-national-guard-troops-kphn3l8c>

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Llars weigh in on potential National Guard deployment in NYC (video)

Newsday, August 31, 2025 ::

Llars weigh in on potential National Guard deployment in NYC (video)

Newsday, August 31, 2025 :

Note: This video piece is behind a paywall. The producers interviewed Long Island residents both opposed and supportive of deploying National Guard troops in a crime prevention role in NYC.

Following President Trump's order to deploy the National Guard in Washington, D.C., there's speculation that he could do the same in New York City, which drew mixed reactions from Long Islanders. NewsdayTV's Macy Egeland reports. Credit: AP/J. Scott Applewhite; Mariam Zuhaib; TNS/ Kevin Dietsch; Alex Wong/Newsday/ John Paraskevas

<https://www.newsday.com/long-island/president-donald-trump-national-guard-troops-kphn3l8c>

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Crime Festers in Republican States While Their Troops Patrol Washington

New York Times, Sept. 1, 2025 ::

Republican governors who have mustered National Guard troops for deployment in blue-state cities may re-examine their deployments if federal intervention significantly brings crime down.

Note: This item is provided for your information.

When Tennessee's Republican governor, Bill Lee, dispatched his National Guard troops to Washington to support President Trump's crackdown on crime, Democrats and other critics wondered why he didn't keep them within state lines.

Memphis, after all, has long been one of the most dangerous cities in the country, with a murder rate about twice as high as the nation's capital, according to F.B.I. statistics. Nashville has a higher rate of violent crime than Washington as well.

The same questions could be asked of other Republican governors like Greg Abbott in Texas, Mike DeWine in Ohio and Mike Kehoe in Missouri, since cities under their purview all have higher rates of violent crime than the nation's capital. Yet no Republican governor has asked for federal intervention.

The image of red-state governors mustering uniformed troops for duty in blue-state cities has left many Americans with the foreboding sense of a nation dangerously divided, perhaps even drifting toward open conflict. Mr. Trump denied statistical reality last week when he was asked whether he might send federal forces into high-crime cities in Republican-led states. "Sure," he said, "but there aren't that many."

There are that many: Kansas City, St. Louis and Springfield, Mo.; Birmingham, Ala.; Cleveland, Dayton and Toledo, Ohio; Tulsa, Okla.; Memphis and Nashville; Houston; Little Rock, Ark.; Salt Lake City; and Shreveport, La., all have crime rates comparable to Washington's, according to F.B.I. statistics.

But the reality of Mr. Trump's deployments in Washington has also not matched the stark "invasion" rhetoric of some Democrats, who have raised the specter of an uninvited occupying force in their cities. Indeed, Republican governors who have so far declined to ask the president for an intervention in their cities might be tempted to rethink that stance.

The supplementary forces in Washington, provided by and funded by Mr. Trump, have had a noticeable impact, at least in the short term. Washington's mayor, Muriel Bowser, has softened her tone on the deployment, crediting it for "more accountability" and a reduction in some crimes, particularly carjackings.

Even in Chicago, which Mr. Trump has said may be next in his crime agenda, the signals lately have been mixed. Brandon Johnson, the city's progressive Democratic mayor, has stood resolutely against his streets being "occupied by federal troops," but his police chief, Larry Snelling, has struck a softer tone. If the National Guard were to flood his city, Mr. Snelling told reporters last week, he hoped that with better

communication, local and federal forces could “find some type of balance” and avoid “an adversarial environment.”

Mayor Brandon Johnson of Chicago has stood resolutely against his streets being “occupied by federal troops.” Credit...Jamie Kelter Davis for The New York Times

Red-state governors sending their National Guard troops to blue-state cities is just another example of the political divide in the country that has become the standard. It is also another example of Republicans going out of the way to curry favor with Mr. Trump.

Republican governors did not want to answer why they were willing to send their National Guard troops to Washington while not inviting the same attention to their cities.

In Texas, Andrew Mahaleris, a spokesman for Mr. Abbott, declined to comment on whether the governor had made any specific requests of Mr. Trump to help fight crime in San Antonio or Houston. The question, he said, should be directed to the Department of Homeland Security.

Dan Tierney, a spokesman for Governor DeWine, said under Ohio law, mayors would have to request any assistance from the state, and “no current mayoral requests for National Guard assistance” have come in.

Aides to Governor Lee of Tennessee did not respond to the question.

Adam Gelb, the president and chief executive of the Council on Criminal Justice, a nonpartisan research organization, stated what he said was obvious — Mr. Trump is not basing his interventions on crime rates.

“The federal government almost never does anything based on pure statistics,” Mr. Gelb said. “No administration would just look at a chart and go straight down the list based on rates of violence.”

Jeffrey A. Butts, executive director of the Research and Evaluation Center at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York, noted that even in Washington, federal resources are not actually being targeted where they would make the most difference, in high-crime neighborhoods far from the photogenic monuments and government buildings where National Guard troops are patrolling.

“If you accept the premise that it is OK to use military resources in the name of securing public safety, which is very debatable and I think historically should be rejected, they would be in the communities with the highest rates of gun violence,” Mr. Butts said.

“They’re not doing it to improve public safety,” he continued. “It’s designed to humiliate political opponents.”

But if Mr. Trump has a political imperative, so do his targets. States need to balance their budgets, unlike the federal government. The federal government is covering the cost of more than 2,000 National Guard troops sent to Washington from six states, at an estimated cost of \$1 million a day. That serves as a reminder that such resources could also be available in other cities, if requested.

Federal support for local policing has also had a long history of bipartisan support. Ms. Bowser is one of many Democratic politicians who have sought to put more police on the beat but have run up against budget constraints. Democrats in Congress have been the primary champions of federal assistance for local police forces through the Community Oriented Policing Services — or COPS — program, first passed as part of President Bill Clinton's crime bill in 1994.

Federal-local partnerships have always shown promise, said Thomas Abt, founding director of the Center for the Study and Practice of Violence Reduction at the University of Maryland. Working with mayors and local officials, the center has become involved with violence reduction efforts in Memphis and Knoxville, Tenn., as well as St. Louis and Boston.

In all four cities, reforms have emphasized intervening with the people and places at the highest risk of violence, balancing accountability with empathy, and maintaining legitimacy and credibility in high-crime communities, said Mr. Abt, who wrote a book on violence reduction, "Bleeding Out."

Knoxville, St. Louis and Boston have seen violent crime rates decline faster than the national average, he said, and Memphis — the newest city to partner with the center — is on track to join them.

"Reducing crime is a team sport," he said. "Mayors and governors would appreciate sustained support and sustained collaboration from their federal partners. They always have and they always will."

But Democratic governors say that vision has little in common with the masked federal agents and uniformed military troops on Washington's streets. In a statement last week, 19 Democratic governors said the president had cut federal funding for law enforcement and was undermining their authority over their respective National Guards.

"Whether it's Illinois, Maryland and New York or another state tomorrow, the president's threats and efforts to deploy a state's National Guard without the request and consent of that state's governor is an alarming abuse of power, ineffective, and undermines the mission of our service members," the governors said.

David W. Chen reports on state legislatures, state level policymaking and the political forces behind them.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/09/01/us/politics/crime-republican-states.html>

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Military will now drug test troops for psychedelic mushrooms

Task and Purpose, August 29, 2025 ::

Military personnel will now be tested for magic mushrooms or “shrooms,” according to changes to the Pentagon’s drug policy.

An Aug. 18 memo from the Pentagon states that psilocin would be added to drug panels that the military uses to test service members for drug use. The key ingredient in psychedelic mushrooms is psilocybin, and when consumed, it’s converted in the body to psilocin, which produces a hallucinogenic effect or altered state.

Both psilocin and psilocybin are classified as Schedule I drugs by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, which means they have are determined to have no federally accepted medical use, and have potential for abuse. Despite this, psilocybin-assisted therapy has been legalized in Colorado, New Mexico, Oregon, and several other states have passed or are working on legislation for further medical research, according to a tracker by Psychedelic Alpha, a site maintained by University of California, Berkley.

“Due to the risk of impairment and subsequent deterioration of security, military fitness, readiness, good order and discipline,” psilocin will be added to service member drug testing panels as of Oct. 1, 2025, according to the memo. The notice adds that the Pentagon is updating its drug detection and deterrence program to “address new and emerging drug threats.”

Troops have long been tested for marijuana, cocaine, methamphetamines like MDMA, Molly or Ecstasy, and heroin use, and in recent years, the services have added newer drug compounds like Delta-8, a cannabis concentrate.

A new Department of Defense instruction from last week lays out updates, which are mostly administrative, to the military’s drug testing program and notes that the Pentagon will collect data from troop urinalysis testing to do long-term studies that analyze “the extent of drug abuse among military personnel.”

“The Department of Defense maintains a zero tolerance policy prohibiting drug use, and we remain committed to continually expanding drug testing capabilities and enhancing our education and prevention efforts by providing effective information on drug misuse, including the use of Psilocin,” a defense official said in a statement.

While troops in service will not be able to take shrooms, once they leave service, they very well might join other veterans turning to psilocybin and other psychedelics for

therapeutic uses such as mental health. The use of “innovative therapies” like psychedelics to treat veteran-specific ailments like PTSD or chronic pain has even gained the attention of Congress. A bill introduced in April would create centers of excellence within the Department of Veterans affairs to study and treat veterans with these novel therapies.

<https://taskandpurpose.com/news/pentagon-psychedelic-mushrooms/>

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Trump administration use of National Guard in L.A. violated law, judge rules

Washington Post, Sept. 2, 2025 :

The Trump administration illegally used National Guard troops it deployed to Los Angeles this summer amid protests over immigration raids, willfully violating a law that prohibits the military from carrying out domestic law enforcement, a federal judge ruled Tuesday.

U.S. District Judge Charles R. Breyer in San Francisco said federal officials violated the Posse Comitatus Act and “expressly instructed” troops that they “could engage in certain law enforcement activities: setting up protective perimeters, traffic blockades, crowd control, and the like.”

“That instruction was incorrect,” he wrote.

Breyer’s ruling, in a case brought by California Gov. Gavin Newsom (D), came as President Donald Trump has argued that National Guard deployments are needed to fight crime in cities including Chicago, Baltimore and New York. Using his presidential authority over the D.C. National Guard, Trump last month began deploying troops as well as federal agents alongside local police in the nation’s capital.

While taking sharp aim at the Trump administration for its actions in Los Angeles, Breyer also noted the “narrowly tailored” limits of his order. He said it did not require the administration to pull back the 300 National Guard troops who remain in the city. Nor, he said, did it apply to National Guard troops in other states.

The judge also stayed his ruling from taking effect until Sept. 12, giving the administration a 10-day window to file an expected appeal. The Justice Department declined to comment on Breyer’s ruling or any potential appeal.

Under Breyer’s order, troops would only be allowed to do things including “protect federal property in a manner consistent with the Posse Comitatus Act.” They would be blocked, however, from being deployed, trained or used “to execute the laws,” with

prohibited actions including carrying out arrests, apprehensions, searches, seizures, security patrols and traffic control.

Speaking at the White House, Trump dismissed Breyer as “a radical left judge.” But he emphasized that the ruling did not order the remaining troops withdrawn from Los Angeles.

“They can continue to be in place,” Trump said. “That’s all we need.”

Earlier this summer, Trump sent about 4,000 National Guard troops and 700 Marines to Los Angeles in response to protests that erupted following immigration raids in the nation’s second-largest city. While the administration portrayed it as a necessary response, local and state officials denounced the deployments, saying that they could manage the demonstrations and that federal intervention was inflammatory.

California officials said military forces in this case were “pervasively intertwined with civilian law enforcement activities.” They argued in court papers that the Posse Comitatus Act, which “has long embodied our Nation’s commitment to limiting military intrusion into civilian affairs,” was threatened when troops were sent to accompany immigration agents carrying out raids.

Breyer, a President Bill Clinton appointee, wrote dismissively in his ruling of the Trump administration’s rationale for deploying troops to Los Angeles in the first place, saying that they were dispatched “ostensibly to quell a rebellion and ensure that federal immigration law was enforced.”

“There were indeed protests in Los Angeles, and some individuals engaged in violence,” Breyer wrote. “Yet there was no rebellion, nor was civilian law enforcement unable to respond to the protests and enforce the law.”

Breyer suggested that granting an injunction in this case was warranted, in part, because hundreds of troops remain in Los Angeles who “have already been improperly trained” about what they can and cannot do. He also highlighted Trump’s rhetoric about deploying troops to other cities, “thus creating a national police force with the President as its chief.”

The Trump administration pushed back on the idea that troops in Los Angeles were carrying out law enforcement actions. The Justice Department argued in court papers that the troops were acting instead to protect federal law enforcement, saying “the National Guard and Marines do not engage in law enforcement merely because they protect those who do.”

In a statement, White House spokeswoman Anna Kelly said that the Los Angeles deployment was a success and that the judge’s ruling “will not be the final say on the issue.”

“Once again, a rogue judge is trying to usurp the authority of the Commander-in-Chief to protect American cities from violence and destruction,” Kelly said. “President Trump saved Los Angeles, which was overrun by deranged leftist lunatics sowing mass chaos until he stepped in.”

Newsom extolled Breyer’s ruling, saying the judge “sided with democracy and the Constitution.”

“Trump’s attempt to use federal troops as his personal police force is illegal, authoritarian, and must be stopped in every courtroom across this country,” Newsom said in a statement.

California Attorney General Rob Bonta (D) said in a statement that Trump had “trampled on one of the very basic foundations of our democracy: That our military be apolitical and the activities of troops on U.S. soil be extremely limited to ensure civil liberties and protect against military overreach.”

Later on Tuesday, California officials filed a motion asking the court to block the deployment of the remaining 300 troops. They wrote that there was no legal justification for the troops’ ongoing deployment.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2025/09/02/trump-administration-use-national-guard-la-violated-law-judge-rules/>

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Pentagon readies military deployment in Chicago

The Week, Sept. 3, 2025 :

What happened

Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker assailed President Trump for his threat to send the National Guard into Chicago, calling it an illegal and "un-American" scheme hatched by a "wannabe dictator." Trump cited Chicago, New York, and Baltimore as possible next targets for federal intervention, while claiming his takeover of Washington, D.C.'s police force and deployment of National Guard troops and federal law enforcement agents to the nation's capital had made the "hellhole" city safe. *The Washington Post* reported that the [Pentagon](#) has spent weeks sketching out a plan that would see thousands of Illinois National Guard deployed in Chicago; the use of active-duty troops had also been discussed. Calling the nation's third-most populous city "a killing field," Trump said he could "solve Chicago" in a week or less. Pritzker noted Chicago has seen a 32% homicide drop since last year, and that many Republican-run cities have higher murder

rates. Trump's real goal is not to fight crime, the [Democrat](#) said, but "to lay the groundwork to circumvent our democracy, militarize our cities, and end elections."

Trump signed an executive order directing Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth to create a "quick reaction force" in the guard "available for rapid nationwide deployment" to "cities where public safety and order has been lost." Under Hegseth's orders, some of the more than 2,200 guard troops in D.C. began [carrying weapons](#) on patrol. The troops have largely been stationed in heavily touristed areas like the National Mall, and some have been assigned to trash removal and landscaping duties.

Trump said Democrats who oppose his blue-city interventions are walking into a "trap," and that his shows of force would be welcomed by a crime-weary public. "They say, 'He's a dictator, he's a dictator,'" Trump said at an Oval Office event. "A lot of people are saying, 'Maybe we'd like a dictator.' I don't like a dictator." He dismissed questions about whether he can legally deploy soldiers to Chicago without Gov. Pritzker's approval. "I have the right to do anything I want to do," he said. "I'm the president of the United States."

What the columnists said

"No thank you," said the *Chicago Tribune* in an editorial. We've seen what's [unfolded in D.C.](#), where residents have endured "the dystopian presence" of armed soldiers patrolling neighborhoods that fit nobody's "definition of crime-riddled." The show of military power in Georgetown and on the Mall exposes the supposed "crime emergency" as "little more than a pretext for Trump to display his vision of a muscular executive branch intervening in the affairs of urban America." That's "the last thing Chicago needs."

"Trump is selling a dangerous lie about the city I've made a life in," said Kimberly Atkins Stohr in *The Boston Globe*. D.C. is a vibrant metropolis where, despite Trump's claims, nobody was afraid to go out to dinner. But restaurants are suffering now because residents are staying home, spooked by an armed occupation that "bears all the hallmarks of a fascist regime." In immigrant neighborhoods, there are deserted streets and a "palpable sense of fear," said Daniella Silva and Megan Lebowitz in *NBCNews.com*. Residents report groups of ICE agents grabbing men off the streets and checkpoints where every driver is asked for identification. Margarita, a Salvadoran immigrant who runs a restaurant, said half her employees are afraid to come to work. "People are traumatized," she said.

This is tricky territory for Democrats, said Rachael Bade in *Politico*. Eight in 10 Washingtonians oppose Trump's D.C. occupation, but Trump "is playing to a national audience." Crime stats in D.C., Chicago, and other cities may be down, but citing numbers only goes so far when people feel unsafe, and Democrats who dismiss their concerns are playing a losing game. They need to look at last week's Harvard poll, which showed that 54% of voters think Trump's actions in Washington are "justified and necessary."

My hometown of Chicago and other big cities "really *are* irreparably broken," said Jeffrey Blehar in *National Review*. But in Chicago, so vast it makes D.C. look like "a torn postage stamp," flooding the Loop with troops won't fix anything, no matter how "brilliant" it might be politically. And there's another catch: It's blatantly illegal. Trump's lust for power can't override a Constitution that "grants police powers to the states," not the federal government.

Trump's goal of a civil rapid reaction force is sparking alarm among some former National Guard brass, said Anne Flaherty in *ABCNews.com*. The guard's mission is to help fight foreign enemies or aid Americans "in times of extraordinary crisis." But Trump wants units whose purpose is to "dominate and police the American people," said retired Maj. Gen. Randy Manner. "And that is extremely disturbing." Using troops for domestic law enforcement could have unsettling consequences, said retired Maj. Gen. Linda Singh. "What happens if there's an escalation and civilians are killed?" she said. "We are setting precedents we can't come back from."

America has turned a dangerous corner, said Garrett Graff in his newsletter. We've suddenly become a country "where armed officers of the state shout, 'Papers please!'" at people heading home from work, a country where [masked men](#) throw people into unmarked cars, "disappearing them into an opaque system where their family members beg for information." Now Trump is threatening domestic opponents such as Pritzker with D.C.-like occupations, claiming "emergency powers in a moment where the only emergency is his own abuse of power." This "is what American fascism looks like."

What next?

We now have a clear sign that Trump "intends to expand the U.S. military's role in domestic law enforcement," said Zachary Cohen in *CNN.com*. His National Guard executive order also calls for every state to create specialized units focused on "public order issues." But questions remain "about how the order will work in practice." The guard "already has reaction forces" in each state and territory, who are under the command and control of governors. Trump's order doesn't say what authority the new units would report to if they're deployed over a governor's objection. Nor does it say how such units would train "or whether there would be coordination between those units across the states." Whatever the details, the alarming upshot is clear, said William Kristol in *The Bulwark*. The National Guard is being "turned into the president's own rapid domestic deployment force, to be used at his unchecked discretion." The guard deployments in Los Angeles and Washington were "presented as exceptional." Now "it is to become the rule."

<https://theweek.com/politics/pentagon-readies-military-deployment-chicago>

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Trump Floats Sending National Guard to New Orleans Despite Drop in Crime

New York Times, Sept., 3, 2025 :

President Trump on Wednesday floated the possibility of deploying National Guard troops to New Orleans, adding it to a list of Democratic-led cities he has threatened to send troops to despite recent reductions in crime.

Unlike the other cities Mr. Trump has mentioned — which include Chicago, New York and Baltimore — New Orleans is in a state run by a Republican, Gov. Jeff Landry, who said he welcomed federal law enforcement support.

“We’re making a determination now,” Mr. Trump said on Wednesday, speaking to reporters at the White House. “Do we go to Chicago,” where city and state leaders warned the president not to send troops, “or do we go to a place like New Orleans where we have a great governor, Jeff Landry, who wants us to come in and straighten out a very nice section of this country that’s become quite tough?”

Mr. Landry shared a news clip of the exchange on social media and said Louisiana would accept the president’s help “from New Orleans to Shreveport!”

He is among the Republican governors who sent National Guard troops last month to Washington after Mr. Trump began a federal law enforcement takeover of the nation’s capital. Mr. Landry has also taken an aggressive stance against crime in the state and in New Orleans, including by establishing a special unit of state police last year to focus solely on the city.

According to preliminary data from the New Orleans Police Department, the city has experienced a drop in all kinds of violent crime this year, including a 22 percent decrease in murders. That comes even after a New Year’s Day terrorist attack on Bourbon Street, where a man from Texas drove a truck into a crowd of revelers and killed 14 people.

In 2024, the agency had also reported a decrease in crime, which had spiked around the time of the coronavirus pandemic, to below prepandemic levels.

But Mr. Trump has fixated on perceived lawlessness in cities with Democratic mayors and berated their elected leaders, at times obfuscating how crime has decreased in those cities. His decisions to send troops to Washington and Los Angeles were met with outcry from leaders and some residents. The Los Angeles deployment in June, a response to protests against an immigration crackdown, prompted a lawsuit and a ruling from a federal judge on Tuesday that sending federal troops there was illegal.

In a joint statement Wednesday afternoon, the city of New Orleans and the Police Department did not directly address the president’s remarks about the National Guard.

Instead, the statement noted the city's reduction in crime and previous work with federal and state law enforcement, including during major events like Mardi Gras. And it pledged a commitment "to sustaining this momentum, ensuring that every neighborhood continues to feel the impact of these combined efforts."

But some Democrats, including those vying to replace New Orleans's term-limited mayor, LaToya Cantrell, criticized the president. Helena N. Moreno, the New Orleans City Council vice president and a candidate for mayor, said Mr. Trump's words were about "scare tactics and politicizing public safety," while State Senator Royce Duplessis, another Democratic mayoral candidate, said residents "deserve safety and stability, not to be used as pawns in partisan theater."

<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/09/03/us/politics/trump-national-guard-new-orleans-crime.html>

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DC National Guard troops have orders extended through December, official says

Associated Press, Sept. 4, 2025 :

WASHINGTON (AP) — District of Columbia National Guard troops who are deployed as part of President Donald Trump's federal law enforcement intervention in the nation's capital have had their orders extended through December, a National Guard official said.

The main purpose of the extension is to ensure that any D.C. Guard members out on the streets of Washington will continue to have uninterrupted benefits and pay for a mission that seems likely to persist for months, the official said.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to talk to the media, said that while the extension doesn't mean that all 950 D.C. Guard troops now deployed will serve until the end of December, it is a strong indication that their role is not winding down anytime soon.

Typically, Guard members need to be on active orders for more than 30 days to qualify for benefits like a housing allowance or health care, and issuing multiple extensions to those orders can sometimes cause interruptions.

National Guard members from Republican-led states also have been sent to Washington. How long those troops, who number 1,334, remain in the nation's capital is up to their individual governors.

A spokesperson for the joint task force overseeing all Guard troops deployed to Washington and the Pentagon directed questions about the extension to the White House. In response to questions, a White House official said Trump was committed to the long-term safety and security of Washington.

The National Guard official said leaders also are expected to begin putting out policies on leave and time off for deployed troops — another sign that military leaders expect the deployment to go on for a longer period of time.

The task force acknowledged Monday that it was “aware of concerns regarding pay and benefits for members of Joint Task Force-District of Columbia.”

“While exceptions exist, the majority of service members are mobilized on orders extending beyond 30 days, ensuring they qualify for full benefits,” the task force said in a statement.

CNN was first to report the D.C. Guard’s extension.

<https://apnews.com/article/national-guard-dc-troops-extended-trump-crime-829278c21a182d28c907ff4ef25bb952>

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Trump to Sign Order Renaming the Defense Department as the Department of War

New York Times, Sept. 4, 2025 :

President Trump will sign an executive order on Friday renaming the Department of Defense as the Department of War, the White House said, fulfilling the president’s pledge to realign the mission of the armed forces by reverting to a name used for over 150 years until shortly after World War II.

The measure, which has been expected for some time, underscores Mr. Trump’s efforts to reshape the military to align with his goals of projecting a more aggressive image by showcasing war-fighting capabilities.

As Mr. Trump has sought to show strength, rather than the “wokeness” that he and Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth claim clouded the military’s morale and mission under former President Biden, he has often referred back to the country’s dominant role in global conflicts and complained that it has not been celebrated enough.

Mr. Trump’s plan to sign the executive order was first reported by Fox News.

Mr. Trump first floated the idea in August in the Oval Office, saying it sounded “like a better name” and that he believed “we’re going to have to go back to that.” He said the name change would be a reminder of the country’s record of military victories under the old name, citing World War I and II.

“We had an unbelievable history of victory when it was Department of War,” Mr. Trump said.

“Defense is too defensive,” he added. “And we want to be defensive, but we want to be offensive too if we have to be.”

The month before Mr. Trump floated the idea, he referred to Mr. Hegseth as his “secretary of war.”

The Department of War was established by Congress under President George Washington in 1789, just months after the Constitution was ratified. The department oversaw the new nation’s military forces.

The name held for 150 years, during which the United States fought wars against Britain, Spain, Mexico and in the Philippines, as well as the Civil War and wars against Native Americans.

President Harry S. Truman changed the agency’s name as part of the National Security Act he signed in 1947, which merged the Navy and War departments and a newly independent Air Force into a single organization called the National Military Establishment. That operated under a civilian secretary of defense who also oversaw the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Two years later, Congress amended the National Security Act, and the National Military Establishment was renamed the Defense Department.

Mr. Hegseth has repeatedly teased rebranding the Pentagon with a new name, most recently telling “Fox & Friends” on Wednesday, “We won World War I and World War II, not with the Department of Defense, but with the Department of War.” In March, Mr. Hegseth even polled his followers on X on a name change.

Senator Rick Scott of Florida, a Republican and a staunch Trump supporter, said on social media that the change would reflect America’s “true capabilities to win wars, not just respond to them,” calling the U.S. military “the most lethal fighting force on the planet.”

Senator Andy Kim of New Jersey, a Democrat, pushed back. “Americans want to prevent wars, not tout them,” he said on social media.

The Department of Defense and the secretary of defense were named through acts of Congress, so it is unclear if Mr. Trump’s order will go into effect immediately. During his

August remarks about the potential renaming, Mr. Trump said he was confident that it would stick.

"I'm sure Congress will go along if we need that," he said, then added, "I don't think we even need that."

<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/09/04/us/politics/trump-department-of-war-defense.html>

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Funeral Honors

LETTER TO THE EDITOR Thank you from family of Harland J. Hennessey

Rome Sentinel, August 30, 2025 ::

On Saturday, Aug. 23, Harland J. Hennessey was laid to rest alongside his parents in Boonville Cemetery. The Hennessey and Gydesen families would like to thank James Bell, of the U.S. Army, who made the initial contact informing us that the Army had identified Harland; Sgt. First Class Scott Hardin, of the U.S. Army, Fort Drum Tenth Mountain Division, who guided us through this procedure; Carl Trainor of Trainor Funeral Home, for his attention to detail, and to his staff Wendell, Jesse, and Tracy — thank you.

We would also like to thank The Patriot Guard Riders of New York, who escorted our procession. Thank you to the throngs of people who stood along the roadside waving flags, hand over hearts, welcoming Harland home. Thank you to the fire departments for their heart-warming displays of honor. Thank you to Detachment 8 of the New York Army National Guard Funeral Honors Detail for their participation in Harland's funeral.

To Rev. Sean O'Brien, we thank you for your participation and prayers. Thank you to the Harland J. Hennessey Post #5538 and its auxiliary for putting together a wonderful Celebration of Life for Harland. Thank you to the Charles J. Love American Legion Post #406 and the Tun Tavern Leathernecks Marine Corp. League Color Guard.

We would also like to thank Ken Martin and his family at Lodging Kit for compiling the beautiful booklet commemorating Harland's journey, and Scott Leffingwell and O'Connor Printing for printing the booklet. Thank you Awesome Country for the wonderful meal. To the band known as "Small Town Big Band" — you were awesome. The music you played from the '30s and '40s was perfect. Thank you to the Chuck Premo Band for the music under the tent.

Thank you to Boonville Municipal, Boonville Police, the New York State Troopers who guided us home, also to the Oneida County Sheriff's, and the veterans who stood on overpasses between Rochester and Utica waving American flags as we went by.

Lastly, to Samuel Lewis, the Army serviceman, you accompanied Harland home from Hawaii, and gave up many hours of sleep watching over him, thank you!

From a very grateful family, Thank you all!

— The family of Harland J. Hennessey, Boonville

https://www.romesentinel.com/opinion/thank-you-from-family-of-harland-j-hennessey/article_062be30f-b481-471f-8dba-ec0658d2feb6.html

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History

Harlem Hellfighters, including 22 men from Mount Vernon, honored at Arlington National Cemetery

Westchester News 12, Sept. 4, 2025 :

Westchester Congressman George Latimer joined officials and family members in laying a wreath at Arlington National Cemetery on Wednesday.

The group was honoring the Harlem Hellfighters and their descendants.

The Hellfighters were the 369th Infantry Regiment of the New York Army National Guard during both World Wars. It was known as one of the first African-American regiments to serve in World War I.

22 Harlem Hellfighters were from Mount Vernon.

<https://westchester.news12.com/harlem-hellfighters-including-22-men-from-mount-vernon-honored-at-arlington-national-cemetery>

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Mount Vernon honors local Harlem Hellfighters as regiment gets Congressional Gold Medal

Lohud.com, Sept. 4, 2025 :

On the day the Congressional Gold Medal was bestowed on the legendary Harlem Hellfighters for their bravery during World War I, Mount Vernon officials and veterans gathered to honor the local soldiers from the unit who fought and died in France more than a century ago.

The wreath-laying at Warriors Way in Brush Park Wednesday, Sept. 3, coincided with a ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery, a few hours before the gold medal was presented to the Hellfighters, officially the 369th Infantry Regiment, at the U.S. Capitol.

The Hellfighters were an all-Black unit initially relegated to support services in the war but who joined French forces on the front lines. They were best known for the 191 consecutive days of combat, among the longest by any American unit, during which they ceded no ground and had no soldiers captured.

The honor was approved by Congress and signed into law by President Joe Biden in 2021.

'Shoulder to shoulder'

In Mount Vernon, Mayor Shawyn Patterson-Howard said honoring the historic contributions of Black soldiers was crucial at a time when federal funds to institutions promoting Black history are threatened.

The Hellfighters disproved the fallacy that Black people are not patriotic, she said, and underscored how Black soldiers have fought valiantly in all of this country's wars.

"We've stood with America shoulder to shoulder, side by side, even when she hasn't stood with us," the mayor said.

Mount Vernon Police Department Honor Guard and Taps attend a wreath laying ceremony in memory of Col. Morris Link, a Mount Vernon resident who fought with the Harlem Hellfighters in World War I, and was one of five of the city's Hellfighters who died in the war, Sept. 3, 2025 at Brush Park in Mount Vernon. The Congressional Gold Medal is being bestowed on the Harlem Hellfighters, the 369th Infantry Regiment that fought in World War 1, with a wreath laying ceremony at Arlington Cemetery. Mount Vernon officials timed their ceremony simultaneously with the ceremony in Arlington.

The mayor spoke of Corporal Morris Link, the leader of the contingent of 22 Mount Vernonites who joined the Hellfighters. He and three others, Levi Armstead Robinson, Ernest Williams and Lester Bowe, died in battle and he is buried at the city's historic St. Paul's Church. His younger brother, Oscar Link, was also a Hellfighter and survived combat, but died in 1959 from lung injuries caused by poison gas exposure during the war.

And while the French credited their bravery and honored the Hellfighters with their highest military honor, the Croix de Guerre, there was no similar recognition on this side of the Atlantic after they returned in 1918.

Speaker Mike Johnson said the honor of Congress' highest award was long overdue for a force that epitomized the generations of African-Americans who fought for freedom on battlefields abroad and at home and that the "lesson of courage, honor and duty that we learned from these men endures to this day."

"Their nation asked them to fight and they did again and again even while being denied the full measure of those freedoms here on American soil," he said.

<https://www.lohud.com/story/news/local/westchester/mount-vernon/2025/09/04/mount-vernon-westchester-ny-honors-local-harlem-hellfighters-history/85942276007/>

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New York Guard's Harlem Hellfighters Honored by Congress

NationalGuard.mil, Sept. 4, 2025 :

WASHINGTON - Black New York National Guard Soldiers, known as "hellfighters" by their German enemies 100 years ago, were recognized with Congress' highest honor during a Sept. 3 ceremony at the U.S. Capitol.

The Congressional Gold Medal was presented to descendants of some of the 4,000 Soldiers who served in the 369th Infantry Regiment, nicknamed the Harlem Hellfighters, during World War I.

The medal is the "highest honor that this body can bestow on any group or individual," said U.S. Rep. Mike Johnson, the speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives.

The Congressional Gold Medal allows the House and the Senate to "show our national appreciation for the achievements and contributions of truly great Americans," said Johnson, a Republican from Louisiana.

The official recognition of Harlem Hellfighter heroism made the event "a joyous occasion," said Col. Bryon Linnehan, the commander of the Hellfighters of today, the New York Army National Guard's 369th Sustainment Brigade.

Each of the 4,000 Hellfighters had an individual story of courage and sacrifice, Linnehan told an audience that included Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth; Air Force General Dan Caine, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; and Air Force General Steven Nordhaus, the chief of the National Guard Bureau.

“Today’s Hellfighters honor all of these men to preserve their legacy and example,” Linnehan said in his remarks.

Army Maj. Gen. Ray Shields, the adjutant general of New York, and New York Army National Guard Command Sgt. Maj. Leylan Jones, the state senior enlisted leader, also were part of the New York National Guard delegation at the ceremony.

The 369th Infantry got its start in 1916 as the 15th New York, a National Guard unit for Black Americans who wanted to serve in the segregated Army of the time in the days before World War I.

While the unit was based in Harlem, it eventually expanded to include Black Americans from across the country after the United States entered World War I in 1917.

When the Soldiers left for France in 1917, they got a new regimental number. They were denied combat duty with the American Army, but fought with the French Army.

The 369th Infantry Soldiers served in combat for 191 days, took 1,400 casualties, earned 171 Croix de Guerre medals --France’s highest award for valor-- and were the first Americans to march into Germany at the war’s end.

When they came home in 1919, 3,000 Hellfighters marched up New York’s Fifth Avenue, cheered on by hundreds of thousands.

Despite their fame, veterans of the 369th were lynched when they came home - killed by white mobs who resented Black veterans.

Her knowledge of that history made the ceremony in the Capitol’s Emancipation Hall especially powerful, said Staff Sgt. Jodian Beckford, a member of the 369th “Sustainment Brigade’s 1501st Field Feeding Company who attended the ceremony.

As a Black Soldier, it was “more than just a regular day for me,” she said.

“They were being embraced not by families only, but America as a whole. It was an out-of-body experience for me,” Beckford said.

“They were fighting for more than just for the U.S. They were fighting for themselves, to be a part of America,” she added.

Army Spec. Matthew Aronberg, a military police officer who won the 369th’s Best Warrior competition in 2024, said, “It was a complete honor to be there surrounded by the families of the actual heroes.”

“It is very humbling to be there and learn the history, hearing the family stories. Everybody is so passionate about it,” Aronberg added.

The effort to create a Congressional Gold Medal for the Harlem Hellfighters began when Debra Willet, the granddaughter of a Hellfighter, began pushing for honor.

U.S. Rep. Tom Suozzi, a Democrat from New York, embraced the idea. With the support of New York's congressional delegation and others, a bill was signed into law by former President Joe Biden in 2021, commissioning the medal.

"My grandfather and the other brave men that fought alongside him never thought that their courage and their exploits would be celebrated in such a revered setting," Willet said.

"They sacrificed, and they thought that they were making a difference, and today proves that they did," she added.

While in Washington, the 369th delegation of 11 officers and enlisted Soldiers also laid a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery.

They also visited the grave of Sgt. Henry Johnson, a 369th Soldier from Albany who was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for his heroic actions.

The day ended with a reception at the French embassy in Washington.

"It was an important time for them to connect with the unit's history, and also be part of it," Linnehan said.

But the most impressive part of the day for him, Linnehan recalled, was when the descendants of Harlem Hellfighters in the audience were asked to stand up.

"That was moving, having the descendants there," he said. "I really appreciated that our country's leadership turned out for them."

The 369th delegation was presented with a bronze version of the gold medal presented to Willet.

That's appropriate, Linnehan said. The Frenchmen whom the Black Americans of the 369th fought beside called them the "hommes de Bronze" or "men of Bronze" because of their color and their courage, he added.

<https://www.nationalguard.mil/News/Article-View/Article/4294044/new-york-guards-harlem-hellfighters-honored-by-congress/>

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Harlem Hellfighters 'who faced the enemy head-on' receive Congressional Gold Medal

Stars and Stripes, Sept. 3, 2025 :

WASHINGTON — The Harlem Hellfighters — an African-American regiment that fought longer on the frontlines of World War I than any other Army unit its size — were honored Wednesday with the Congressional Gold Medal more than a century after the conflict ended.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., accompanied by Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and other members of Congress, led the presentation of Congress' highest civilian honor for distinguished contributions to the relatives and loved ones of the Harlem Hellfighters.

Nicknamed “hellfighters” for their tenaciousness on the battlefield, the 369th Infantry Regiment fought for 191 days in continuous combat in France, without losing ground or a single soldier captured, according to Johnson and other speakers at the Gold Medal ceremony.

“My grandfather and the other brave men never thought their courage and exploits would be celebrated in such a revered setting,” said Debra Willett, granddaughter of Sgt. Leander Willett.

She accepted the award on behalf of descendants of the Harlem Hellfighters during a packed two-hour ceremony at Emancipation Hall in the Capitol.

The regiment had about 4,500 Black American soldiers who fought under French command during World War I and experienced about 1,500 casualties.

“Today America pauses to bestow an honor we all know is long overdue,” Johnson told an audience of about 500 people. He said the regiment fought to protect freedoms denied to African-Americans of that era.

For Marcia Holmes, who drove from her home in Pittsburgh, Pa., the award connects her with a past she knew nothing about.

Her ancestor, Henry Davis Primas, was assigned as a private to the regiment's medical detachment due to his background as a pharmacist, according to the National Archives.

“We’ve been shocked and touched to learn about H.D. Primas and his accomplishments,” Holmes said. “I had no information about my great great uncle or his contributions until we received news about the Gold Medal.”

The Harlem Hellfighters originally were a National Guard unit based in Harlem, N.Y. The soldiers filled their mission with purpose, despite experiencing racism and prejudice at home, according to speakers at Wednesday's ceremony.

“These patriots loved America even when America did not show the same love to them,” said Rep. Hakeem Jeffries, D-N.Y.

Col. Bryon Linnehan, commander of the 369th Sustainment Brigade, also formally accepted the honor and offered remarks. The brigade is a New York Army National Guard unit that is a descendant of the Harlem Hellfighters.

“It’s humbling to be in the presence of descendants of our famed World War I heroes,” he said.

Hegseth said the Harlem Hellfighters “faced the enemy head-on and at point blank range.”

“They were exceptional Americans,” he said. “May we honor them forever especially because they were not honored in their time.”

Hegseth took several minutes at the end of the ceremony to detail the history and heroics of the 369th regiment.

The regiment was among the first to be shipped off to Europe to fight in World War I in 1917. But the Harlem Hellfighters faced discrimination within the U.S. Army that was not desegregated until 1948.

The Army assigned the African-American unit to the French army because of segregation within its own ranks. They were issued French weapons and helmets.

Andres Kerne — a retired Army colonel from Maryland who watched the ceremony — said he considers the Harlem Hellfighters’ achievements to be “a critical part of military history — not just as a Black regiment but as soldiers in general. Their contributions are not forgotten.”

There have been two other Congressional Gold Medals awarded to African-American military groups — the Tuskegee Airmen in 2007 and the Montfort Point Marines in 2011, both from World War II.

“Despite the courage, sacrifice and dedication proudly displayed by the Harlem Hellfighters to their country, they returned home to face racism and segregation from their fellow countrymen,” said Rep. Tom Suozzi, D-N.Y., who worked with the Willett family since 2019 to ensure the Harlem Hellfighters were recognized for their military contributions.

In 2019, Suozzi helped obtain a Purple Heart for Sgt. Leander Willett, who was initially declined for lack of documentation, according to Suozzi’s office.

The actions of the Harlem Hellfighters contributed to the eventual desegregation of the military, the Department of Veterans Affairs said after the Harlem Hellfighters Congressional Gold Medal Act was signed into law Aug. 25, 2021.

“The 369th Infantry Regiment will forever be remembered as pioneers of change and defenders of liberty,” the agency said in a news release.

<https://www.stripes.com/history/2025-09-03/harlem-hellfighters-congressional-gold-medal-18967638.html>

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More than 100 years after WWI, 'brave, bold' Harlem Hellfighters awarded Congressional Gold Medal

Spectrum News 1, Sept. 03, 2025:

More than a century after they helped break down color barriers by fighting valiantly on the battlefields of World War I, the storied Harlem Hellfighters on Wednesday received the highest civilian award given by the U.S. Congress.

At a ceremony on Capitol Hill, lawmakers officially awarded the unit the Congressional Gold Medal.

“They were brave, bold, and beguiling patriots who loved America, even when America didn’t show the same love to them,” House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries said at the afternoon ceremony.

What You Need To Know

- More than a century after WWI, Congress awarded the Harlem Hellfighters the Congressional Gold Medal in a ceremony Wednesday
- As an all-Black unit, the Hellfighters faced discrimination among the American ranks, but they would quickly prove themselves, shattering racist stereotypes and spending 191 days in the front line trenches
- Though they received a hero’s welcome when they arrived home, they also returned to a country still steeped in segregation

Rep. Tom Suozzi spearheaded the effort to recognize them with the medal

When the U.S. joined World War I, the New York National Guard's 15th Infantry Regiment (later the 369th Infantry Regiment) was among the first to deploy to Europe.

But, as an all-Black unit, they faced discrimination among the American ranks, and instead ended up under French command, fighting with French equipment.

They would quickly prove themselves, shattering racist stereotypes. They spent more time in continuous combat than any other unit of their size, with 191 days on the front lines, according to the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture.

They suffered 1,400 casualties — more than any other unit.

"They fought with such determination that our French allies called them the Men of Bronze. And even their German adversaries gave them the moniker Harlem Hellfighters," New York Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand said.

Though they received a hero's welcome when they arrived home, they also returned to a country still steeped in segregation. Their heroics would eventually fade from memory.

Rep. Tom Suozzi spearheaded the effort to recognize them with the Congressional Gold Medal.

"Finally, we are here today to say with one voice to the Harlem Hellfighters: 'Thank you, you will never be forgotten,'" he said.

That is a pledge and promise welcomed by the descendants of the courageous unit, who have long fought to see the names of their loved ones etched in history.

"They sacrificed and they thought they were making a difference, and today proves that they did," said Debra Willet, granddaughter of Harlem Hellfighter Sergeant Leander Willet.

As lawmakers shared stories of the Harlem Hellfighters' bravery, one name in particular came up time and time again at Wednesday's ceremony: Sgt. Henry Johnson.

In 1918, Johnson, a slight man from Albany, single-handedly fought off several enemy German attackers, repelling them using a bolo knife and saving a fellow soldier from capture while suffering severe wounds.

Johnson's battlefield heroics during the Battle of the Argonne Forest led Theodore Roosevelt to call him one of the five bravest American soldiers of the war. He became one of the first Americans to be awarded the French Croix de Guerre avec Palme, France's highest award for valor, before dying in July 1929. He is buried in Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia.

U.S. Sen. Chuck Schumer led a two-year struggle to posthumously honor Johnson with a Medal of Honor, America's highest award for valor — an effort that came to fruition when Johnson was honored in a 2015 White House ceremony.

Eight years later, the U.S. renamed Fort Polk in Louisiana after the soldier from Albany, naming it Fort Johnson.

But under President Donald Trump's leadership, the Army announced in June Fort Johnson was being changed to Fort Polk.

"I was also proud when it was announced that they would be renaming Fort Polk to Fort Johnson in his honor," Schumer said Wednesday. "And while that decision was reversed earlier this year, I hope today shows what a mistake that was. And why a base deserves to bear the name of one of Harlem Hellfighters' finest."

<https://ny1.com/nyc/all-boroughs/politics/2025/09/04/100-yrs-after-wwi---brave--bold--harlem-hellfighters-awarded-congressional-gold-medal>

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'Harlem Hellfighters' honored with Congressional Gold Medal at U.S. Capitol (video)

WABC, Sept. 3, 2025 :

WASHINGTON, D.C. (WABC) -- Wednesday represented a long overdue day of recognition for a unit of more than 4,000 brave African American soldiers from New York who fought in World War I, known as the "Harlem Hellfighters."

At a ceremony on Wednesday afternoon at the U.S. Capitol, the granddaughter of a Hellfighter accepted a Congressional Gold Medal honoring the unit on behalf of all its descendants.

They were denied the chance to fight under U.S. command because of discrimination.

The Hellfighters were placed with French forces, spending 191 days in continuous active combat, and earning France's highest military honor.

Recognition in the U.S. didn't come until a Congressional Act in 2021.

Also on Wednesday, Mount Vernon's mayor hosted a wreath-laying ceremony in Brush Park to honor Corporal Morris D. Link, a Mount Vernon native killed while serving with the Hellfighters.

<https://abc7ny.com/post/harlem-hellfighters-including-4000-african-american-soldiers-honored-congressional-gold-medal-service-wwi/17734266/>

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Legendary WWI unit the Harlem Hellfighters honored with Congressional Gold Medal in Washington

New York Post, Sept. 3, 2025 :

WASHINGTON — Defense officials, congressional leaders and lawmakers honored members of a famed African-American regiment from New York that served during World War I, as part of a ceremony Wednesday on Capitol Hill.

Descendants of those who served in the Harlem Hellfighters were given the Congressional Gold Medal to celebrate the 369th infantry regiment's bravery in the Great War.

Former President Joe Biden had signed legislation in 2021 to award it to the servicemen.

After accepting the medal from House Speaker Mike Johnson, Debra Willett, the granddaughter of Sgt. Leander Willett, said: "My grandfather and the other brave men that fought alongside him never thought that their courage and their exploits would be celebrated in such a revered setting."

"They sacrificed, and they thought that they were making a difference," the Hellfighter descendant added in awe, "and today proves that they did."

An image collage containing 3 images, Image 1 shows Woman shows her Powerball lottery tickets at a liquor store, Image 2 shows Man holding a winning Powerball lottery ticket, Image 3 shows People buying lottery tickets at a newsstand in New York City

Here's how to increase your odds of winning the \$1.3 billion Powerball jackpot ahead of tonight's drawing

An image collage containing 3 images, Image 1 shows Police vehicles and officers outside a public works department building, Image 2 shows Aerial view of multiple police cars at UMass Lowell following a report of a person with a weapon, Image 3 shows Police officers outside a police station

Lockdown on college campus near Boston lifted after reports of possible gunman 'carrying a long weapon'

Johnson added in his closing remarks, “We say again, in no uncertain terms, God bless these boys,” echoing the words that New Yorkers greeted the men with as they returned from the war in the early 1900s.

The speaker was joined by Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) and House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY), as well as members of the New York delegation who spent five years trying to secure the honor for the Hellfighters.

“Today, we honor the legacy of your fathers and grandfathers and great-grandfathers who served our nation under extreme circumstances and despite intense discrimination,” said Rep. Tom Suozzi (D-NY). “We are all better for their service.”

“We know about their 191 consecutive days in combat, from the trenches of France to the banks of the Reine,” said Schumer in his remarks.

Family members of those who served in the Harlem Hellfighters were given the Congressional Gold Medal to celebrate the 369th infantry regiment’s bravery in the Great War.

“We know about their triumphs we know about their tragic losses, including 1,500 casualties, more than any American unit.”

The House Democratic leader also told the story of a private slight of stature but full of courage.

Henry Johnson, who weighed around 130 pounds and stood five feet and four inches tall, ended up “fighting off over 20 enemy troops with nothing more than a jammed rifle and a bolo knife,” according to Jeffries.

“The Germans named them the Hellfighters for their relentless spirit, the french decorated them,” added Rep. Joyce Beatty (D-Ohio), a former chair of the Congressional Black Caucus, “but in America they returned to racism.”

“He gave them hell,” Jeffries said, adding of the “brave, bold and beguiling patriots” that they also “risked everything fighting to protect freedoms they did not fully know.”

“The Germans named them the Hellfighters for their relentless spirit, the French decorated them,” added Rep. Joyce Beatty (D-Ohio), a former chair of the Congressional Black Caucus. “But in America they returned to racism and often to second-class citizenship — to a silence that lasted too long.”

“More than a century later we say their names,” she declared, “we honor their sacrifice we lift up their story as part of a great American story. A story written of black heroes.”

<https://nypost.com/2025/09/03/us-news/harlem-hellfighters-honored-with-congressional-gold-medal-in-washington/>

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Harlem Hellfighters, who spent 191 days in the trenches of WWI, get special congressional honors

Newsday, Sept. 3, 2025 :

The Harlem Hellfighters spent more time in continuous front-line combat in World War I than any other similarly sized American regiment — 191 days in the front-line trenches. They suffered more casualties than any other U.S. regiment. Some 1,500 were killed, wounded or went missing, but none were known to be taken prisoner.

They were the first unit of the French, British or American armies to reach the Rhine River at the end of the war. Army publications have noted legend has it that it was the Germans who gave these adversaries the nickname Hellfighters, "Hollenkämpfer."

Now, more than 110 years after their highly decorated World War I heroics, the Hellfighters on Wednesday finally get their national due as Congressional Gold Medal recipients.

The predominantly Black 369th Infantry Regiment is to be posthumously honored by Congress with the medal for its "unwavering dedication to military service, cultural contributions and bravery in the face of discrimination during World War I."

WHAT NEWSDAY FOUND

- The predominantly Black 369th Infantry Regiment — the Harlem Hellfighters — will be posthumously honored by Congress with the medal for its "unwavering dedication to military service, cultural contributions and bravery in the face of discrimination during World War I."
- The newly minted medal won't be publicly unveiled until shortly before the start of the afternoon ceremony at the Capitol. It is heading to the Smithsonian Institution for display there and in other exhibits; Bronze replicas will be made publicly available from the mint.
- The Hellfighters were the first unit of the French, British or American armies to reach the Rhine River at the end of the war. Upon their return to the States, the Hellfighters were cheered as they marched in a victory parade up Manhattan's Fifth Avenue.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth and other congressional and military officials will be on hand at Emancipation Hall of the U.S. Capitol for the medal presentation.

Wednesday evening, the French Embassy in Washington will hold a reception to applaud the recognition of the Hellfighters, which totaled over 4,000 soldiers, including at least 40 men from the Sea Cliff, Locust Valley, Oyster Bay and Glen Cove area.

Debra Willett, of Glen Cove, granddaughter of Harlem Hellfighter Sgt. Leader Leander Willett, is to accept the medal on behalf of all Hellfighter descendants and deliver brief remarks at the ceremony. She is to be joined by Col. Bryon Linnehan, present-day commander of 369th Sustainment Brigade of the New York National Guard.

"We're just so excited. This means so much," Willett, 67, now of Brentwood, said in an interview Wednesday.

She said the message she hopes to deliver will be simple and hopeful, and that, "It's never too late to acknowledge the sacrifice and dedication of people in service of the country."

New medal

The newly minted medal won't be publicly unveiled until shortly before the start of the afternoon ceremony at the Capitol. It is heading to the Smithsonian Institution for display there and in other exhibits; Bronze replicas will be made publicly available from the mint.

"It's just such an incredibly fulfilling thing," said Rep. Tom Suozzi (D-Glen Cove), a main sponsor of the legislation leading to the medal. He said he's seen a photo and called it "beautiful."

The presentation Wednesday comes four years after the "Harlem Hellfighters Congressional Gold Medal Act" was signed into law Aug. 25, 2021, by former President Joe Biden. The measure's other main sponsors included Rep. Adriano Espaillat (D-Manhattan, Bronx), and in the Senate, New York Democratic Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, who is to also attend Wednesday's ceremony.

The processes of designing the medal, and striking it, has been underway since Biden's signing the bill.

The Hellfighters had been overlooked for such congressional recognition, even as the Tuskegee Airmen, the name given to the first Black military pilots in WWII, and the Montford Point, the trailblazing first African Americans to be trained in the U.S. Marine Corps, came to join the list of about 200 gold medal recipients.

War service

The 369th Infantry began as the 15th Infantry Regiment headquartered in Harlem, essentially a Black American unit in a then-segregated Army and National Guard. When the U.S. joined the war in 1917, the unit's commander lobbied hard for his soldiers to be shipped out to Europe, too.

But after arriving, the regiment was not integrated into U.S. military units, mostly relegated to supporting roles such as unloading ships, driving trucks and serving food. Until, that is, the French army — needing troops and willing to use Black American soldiers — took the regiment under its command, on loan, and provided it with French weapons and gear.

In all, the Hellfighters earned 11 French citations and a unit Croix de Guerre, and 170 soldiers were individually awarded the French Croix de Guerre. Private Henry Johnson, a former Albany rail station porter, was among the most celebrated.

As an aside, the unit also is widely credited as among the first to introduce jazz to France, a form of music that was unknown there at the time.

Upon their return to the States, the Hellfighters were cheered as they marched in a victory parade up Manhattan's Fifth Avenue.

"Unfortunately, their fame quickly faded, and for nearly 100 years the remarkable story of the Harlem Hellfighters was largely erased from America's national consciousness," the National Museum of African American History and Culture asserted in an article on its website several years ago.

Late recognition

Willett credits Suozzi for doggedly pursuing the medal legislation on behalf of her family and other Hellfighter descendants;

Both she and Suozzi explain the push was an offshoot of the congressman's earlier help for her family in obtaining a belated Purple Heart for her Hellfighter grandfather, Leander, who had been stabbed with a bayonet and suffered from the effects of mustard gas. He died in the early 1950s.

Suozzi said that in the process, he came to learn more about the Hellfighters, including that dozens of them came from the Town of Glen Cove and surrounding communities. He determined it was time they got recognition they were due from Congress.

By Billy House

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<https://www.newsday.com/long-island/politics/harlem-hellfighters-ud11fcpi>

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Hegseth Recounts Tenacity, Valor of World War I-era Black Infantry Regiment

DOD News, Sept. 3, 2025 :

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth today recounted the tenacity and valor of a World War I-era all-Black National Guard unit, as descendants of those soldiers accepted the Congressional Gold Medal on behalf of their ancestors' actions during an award ceremony in Washington.

Taking place in the U.S. Capitol's Emancipation Hall, the ceremony honored the "Harlem Hellfighters" of the New York National Guard's 369th Infantry Regiment.

Despite the racial tensions that came with serving in a segregated Army stateside, the men of the 369th became one of the first African American units to serve overseas with the American Expeditionary Force during the war.

Once in Europe, the Harlem Hellfighters tallied 191 consecutive days of frontline combat — more time than any other American unit.

Hegseth began his remarks by highlighting the Hellfighters' tenacity by setting the scene at the beginning of the 369th's deployment from New York to France in the winter of 1917.

He noted that the regiment's ship encountered continuous obstacles — including breaking down and catching fire — resulting in the vessel having to make three attempts at leaving the East Coast between November and December before it could finally make its way toward France.

"And so, they sailed on through cold rain; they were soldiers, volunteers and they were incredible Americans," Hegseth said of the 369th's soldiers as they made their way across the Atlantic.

Prior to reaching France, Hegseth said the soldiers had to further persevere after an English tanker accidentally drifted into their ship, damaging it badly and thus necessitating further repairs in dangerous waters.

"Determined to get to France and take their place in the Great War, the soldiers refused to turn back," Hegseth said.

Once the regiment finally arrived in France on New Year's Day in 1918, Hegseth said the Harlem Hellfighters — who would eventually receive the "Hellfighter" moniker from enemy Germans due to how aggressively the U.S. soldiers fought — immediately went to work fighting under French command.

"Through valleys and over ridges filled with gas and smoke, they forged ahead; they faced the enemy head-on; they faced him at point-blank range; they faced him amid bullets and shells raining down; they were exceptional Americans, so they pushed on," Hegseth said of the Hellfighters' tenacious engagement of the enemy.

During the nearly 200 days of non-stop fighting — and in the process of suffering severe casualties — the Harlem Hellfighters were among the first allied forces to push ahead and cross the Rhine River into Germany.

"Think about that: six months in some of the most ferocious fighting you can imagine [and they] did not give up an inch," Hegseth said.

The secretary added that, when a quarter-million Americans lined the streets of New York in 1919 to celebrate the return of American soldiers from the war, many of the spectators wore lapel pins with an image of a rattlesnake to pay their respects to the 369th, whose members had been dubbed "rattlers" while fighting in Europe.

"[It was] the symbol of the men we honor today as the Harlem Hellfighters; the symbol of these soldiers who were the bravest Americans," Hegseth said.

"We ought always thank almighty God for such men; and may we honor them forever, especially because they were not honored in their time," he concluded.

The Congressional Gold Medal is the highest honor Congress can bestow.

<https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/4293099/hegseth-recounts-tenacity-valor-of-world-war-i-era-black-infantry-regiment/>

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New York Air National Guard

What's All That Ruckus Over the Beach?

The East Hampton Star, August 28, 2025 :

"You hear them before you see them," Nick Lombardo, a fifth-year lifeguard at Indian Wells Beach in Amagansett, said. A thundering rumble, a vibration in the chest; when military aircraft fly by "the whole beach looks up."

From the stand, lifeguards salute the pilots, who often salute back, dangling their legs over the side of an open helicopter door.

“Sometimes we get them to fly in a circle,” Mr. Lombardo said, laughing.

For many beachgoers, the flight of military aircraft overhead feels like regularly scheduled programming. But what are these immense machines, and what are they doing?

“The vast majority of the time we are flying is for training,” explained an instructor pilot, Lt. Col. James Liston of the 106th Rescue Wing at Gabreski Airport in Westhampton Beach, the East End’s nearest Air National Guard base. “We train for missions across the spectrum of personnel recovery and disaster relief, but focus mostly on the complex end of that spectrum: combat search and rescue.”

Aircraft aren’t surveilling the coast for castaways or tracking great white sharks — they’re practicing for wartime operations.

Established in its present iteration in 1975, the 106th Wing — whose stated motto reads “That Others May Live” — produces “some of the only service in the Department of Defense that has dedicated combat search and rescue training,” Lt. Col. Matthew Forbes, a commander at the base, said. When soldiers, civilians, or government employees find themselves isolated in “unfriendly territory” — maybe a fighter jet is shot down in combat — “it’s our job to go in and rescue them,” he said. “We’re available on alert so we can get to them before the enemy, or before they have some kind of medical problem that causes them to expire.”

Training consists of various “rehearsal missions.” Some are more basic, like maintaining the ability to fly from point A to point B. Others are tactical: practicing “hoist” pickups for the occasion when a rescue aircraft can’t land, or shooting guns off into the water. (“Well offshore!” Colonel Forbes emphasized.)

The 106th Wing primarily flies HH-60W Jolly Green Giant II (the “Whiskey”) search and rescue helicopters, which replaced the older HH-60G Pave Hawks (the “Golf”) in October. “It’s got a lot of enhanced avionics,” Colonel Forbes said. “Autopilot, a full glass cockpit, and it moves a lot faster down here at sea level.”

It also has massive 54-foot rotor blades slapping the air and two nearly 2,000-horsepower roaring engines, which create the same sonic sensation that one might experience if James Earl Jones yelled in your ear as loudly as possible.

And the 106th Wing’s helicopters aren’t the only aviation contributing to the military cacophony overhead. “Over in Islip you have the Army National Guard, which looks exactly like our aircraft, flying over Peconic or down along the beaches,” Colonel Forbes said. “You’ll also see Army aircraft flying up from Connecticut and New Jersey.”

Mostly, he said, low-altitude tactile training happens over water so as not to disturb the concentrated population on land. Tell that to my beach naps!

<https://www.easthamptonstar.com/villages/2025828/whats-all-ruckus-over-beach>

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Air National Guard report outlines measures to mitigate PFAS contamination at Stewart base. Here's how you can comment

WAMC, Sept. 3, 2025 :

Environmental advocates are reminding residents of Newburgh and New Windsor that they can comment on an Air National Guard report outlining methods to mitigate PFAS contamination at Stewart Air National Guard base in Orange County.

Around 2016, residents of Newburgh and New Windsor were notified that their public and private drinking water sources had been contaminated with PFAS "forever chemicals" stemming from the use of firefighting foam at Stewart Air National Guard Base. PFAS has been linked to a variety of diseases and health concerns, from cancer to increased infertility.

Since then, Newburgh has pivoted from its longtime water source, Washington Lake, and fluctuated between New York City's main water supply, the Catskill Aqueduct, and Browns Pond. Resident Jennifer Rawlison is a lifelong Newburgh resident, and an advocate with the Newburgh Clean Water Project.

"For over 100 years, Newburgh was autonomous. Washington Lake was our reservoir, our source of water, and we didn't have to worry about permissions from others in terms of how to access it and things like that," says Rawlison. "We are fortunate that we are on the Catskill Aqueduct — many other communities I know around the nation don't have that option — but with the contamination, it's like we've lost a lot of our own power and resource."

Despite calls from residents and lawmakers alike, cleanup has been slow going. Advocates say a military report detailing the full extent and location of the contamination isn't expected until sometime next year, and the next question — what to do about it — could take at least a couple years to examine.

Meantime, contaminated water is still seeping into the local watershed from Stewart Air National Guard Base. Rawlison, who is also a member of the Restoration Advisory Board updating residents on the cleanup process, says the current mitigation method is to treat and filter a lot of that water at Recreation Pond. But, she says, contaminated

groundwater still finds its way into cracked stormwater pipes, and Recreation Pond is frequently overwhelmed by heavy rain.

"Unfortunately any rain event seems to exacerbate everything," she explains. "We were able to take a tour of the base back in May of 2024, and I have a photo where the weir is being breached because the area that holds the clean water is very small, and the weir is not very high. And so, when the water rises, it just all goes over. And when I asked, they estimated it at about 1,800 gallons of water per minute that were breaching."

A new report by the Air National Guard proposes two mitigation strategies.

"The two basic strategies that they've proposed are to create a trench system where they can capture the groundwater and treat it, and then fix up broken stormwater pipes so that groundwater doesn't enter the stormwater pipes, and can't reach the streams," says Dan Shapely, senior director of Riverkeeper's Advocacy, Policy, and Planning Program. "So, in both cases, it's meant to interrupt the flow of the groundwater that's polluted, and prevent it from leaving the base."

Representatives from the Air National Guard did not return a request for comment to WAMC. Shapely says the report is available for public input through September 8. If approved, the proposal would be implemented starting next year. It would cost roughly \$8.5 million to construct, and \$1 million a year to maintain.

"We're supportive of these actions," he says. "We launched a 'Speed Up the Cleanup' campaign — Riverkeeper and the partners involved in Newburgh — in order to see just this kind of strategy implemented. We want to see actions like this."

Rawlison says the Newburgh Clean Water Project is pleased with the overall proposal, but she feels it's a long time coming and, truly, only a start. She hopes to see residents comment on the report and attend an upcoming meeting of the RAB to keep the momentum going.

"[To make sure] they're reminded we're people," she laughs. "Sometimes I feel like I have to remind them in these meetings that, at the end of the day, all of these discussions boil down to people, communities, children, the environment and our future."

Residents can comment on the report via email to the Air National Guard. Rawlison says a public meeting is scheduled for October 22 at the Newburgh Armory Unity Center to update residents on the latest cleanup efforts.

<https://www.wamc.org/news/2025-09-03/air-national-guard-report-outlines-measures-to-mitigate-pfas-contamination-at-stewart-base-heres-how-you-can-comment>

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Local New York Air National Guard members promoted

Eagle News, Sept. 4, 2025 :

Air Force Major General Michael Bank, the commander of the New York Air National Guard, announced the recent promotion of members of the New York Air National Guard in recognition of their capability for additional responsibility and leadership.

Bradley Addison from Cicero, and assigned to the 174th Attack Wing, received a promotion to the rank of chief master sergeant.

Amanda Kriesel from Liverpool, and assigned to the 174th Attack Wing, received a promotion to the rank of technical sergeant.

<https://eaglenewsonline.com/publications/star-review/2025/09/04/local-new-york-air-national-guard-members-promoted/>

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Several local residents receive promotions with New York Air National Guard

Rome Sentinel, August 30, 2025 ::

LATHAM — Several local airmen have received recent promotions, according to an announcement by Air Force Major Gen. Michael Bank, the commander of the New York Air National Guard, in recognition of their capability for additional responsibility and leadership.

Among those promoted include:

David Blovat, of Oriskany, assigned to the 224th Air Defense Group, promoted to staff sergeant;

Grace Isherwood, of Rome, assigned to the 224th Air Defense Group, promoted to staff sergeant;

Brett Kilborne, of Verona, assigned to the 224th Air Defense Group, promoted to master sergeant;

Benjamin Plumley, of Rome, assigned to the 224th Air Defense Group, promoted to master sergeant;

Gabriella Porter, of New Hartford, assigned to the 174th Attack Wing, promoted to senior airman;

Daniel Silva, of Rome, assigned to the 224th Air Defense Group, promoted to technical sergeant; and

Andrew Washburn, of Taberg, assigned to the 224th Air Defense Group, promoted to master sergeant.

“The New York Air National Guard is built on a foundation of talented and motivated Airmen, and this month’s promotions are a shining example of that excellence,” Bank said. “I am honored to recognize and celebrate the accomplishments of our Airmen, and I look forward to seeing their continued growth and contributions to our organization.”

For more information about the New York Air National Guard or contact a recruiter, visit <https://dmna.ny.gov/ang>.

https://www.romesentinel.com/entertainment-life/notices/advancements/several-local-residents-receive-promotions-with-new-york-air-national-guard/article_60f3261d-0313-43da-a94a-dab30b7709af.html

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New York Army National Guard

Cattaraugus man receives National Guard promotion

Salamanca Press, August 29, 2025 ::

LATHAM — The New York Army National Guard announces Rayquan Flaherty Fantaske of Cattaraugus, assigned to the Company E, 427th Brigade Support Battalion, received a promotion July 30 to the rank of private 1st class.

<https://www.salamancapress.com/2025/08/29/cattaraugus-man-receives-national-guard-promotion/>

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What We Lose by Distorting the Mission of the National Guard

The Atlantic, August 31, 2025::

A compact that has defined the National Guard's legitimacy for generations is being shattered.

Note: The author of this opinion piece served in the New York Army National Guard.

In October 2006, an early winter storm buried western New York under two feet of snow, knocking out power to more than 300,000 homes as temperatures plunged below freezing. Local agencies were overwhelmed. That was the first time I mobilized with the National Guard for domestic-disaster response. We did what Americans expect the Guard to do: Neighbors in uniform arrived with trucks, generators, and training to help our communities recover.

That deployment demonstrated a compact that has defined the National Guard's legitimacy for generations: In extraordinary times, citizen soldiers mobilize to reinforce civilian authority and protect their neighbors. But over the past six months, that trust has shattered. Guardsmen have been called up to fulfill roles far outside their intended purpose, in ways that don't deliver safety and instead escalate tensions in the very neighborhoods they're meant to protect. They've been sent to L.A. to support immigration enforcement and deployed to Washington, D.C., to address an alleged crime crisis. They may soon be organized into specialized units to travel the country for crime suppression and protest control.

The image of the Guard is no longer one of neighbors helping fill sandbags and issuing warm blankets after a storm. It's soldiers standing post on city streets, functioning as police by another name.

I served as a combat engineer in the Army National Guard, where I trained as part of a team that would respond in the case of an attack that used weapons of mass destruction. Our job was clear: pull people from rubble, decontaminate the area, and stabilize the injured. We operated under a civilian incident commander, never questioning whom we were helping or what politics they held. That clarity shaped my understanding of the National Guard: It exists to support, not supplant, civilian institutions.

What is happening today breaks that model and continues a decades-long trend. For some time, politicians at both the federal and state levels have treated the National Guard as a catchall solution to avoid investments in public infrastructure. In 2022, New Mexico called up its National Guard to serve as substitute teachers; in 2021, Massachusetts activated its Guard as bus drivers; and in 2020, the governor of New York had the National Guard serve as New York City garbage collectors. Now the Trump administration is using state troops to fill gaps in law-enforcement capacity without the accountability, training, and community trust that real policing requires.

This trend is dangerous for American democracy. Using the National Guard as the stopgap for every underfunded or politically difficult issue blurs the line between supporting civil authorities and wielding coercive force. It also hollows out civilian

capacity: Political leaders who use the military to patch up social problems are deferring the lasting solutions that these problems require. Instead of building a pipeline of educators, school districts have their governor call up troops as teachers; instead of modernizing sanitation systems, municipal leaders get soldiers to haul trash.

But perhaps the most important loss is trust. The National Guard's moral authority rests on showing up when lives are on the line and then standing down when the crisis ends. The country's Founders understood this deeply. George Washington's Newburgh Address to his officers, in 1783, and his later decision to relinquish his commission enshrined the principle of civilian control. Today, as Americans see Guardsmen deployed in roles that resemble policing, that trust frays. Service members also feel the dissonance. One member of the California National Guard told me that they were proud to be called up in January to support firefighters during the Palisades Fire. When this member was activated again just six months later, as part of a federal mobilization that ordered the National Guard to support immigration enforcement, they saw the earlier warm welcome and relief on the faces of L.A. residents replaced by dread. Trained for combat and disaster response, members of the National Guard now find themselves cast as occupiers in their own communities.

Leaders justify these deployments as responses to exigent circumstances, such as a shortage of police to fight rising crime. But crime is a policy problem with deep social roots. It requires sustained civilian work: officers accountable to neighborhoods, courts that move cases fairly, and social services that address addiction and poverty. Soldiers can make a show of force on city streets, but real public safety requires strengthening ties of trust across communities and providing reliable due process. Do we really want to live in a country where troop presences substitute for actual governance, and civic problems are met with military deployments?

The national-security costs of using the Guard in this way are real too. For three decades, Guardsmen have rotated through seemingly never-ending deployments to Kosovo, Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Ukraine, and the Horn of Africa. Adding domestic-policing duties to the list of responsibilities degrades the Guard's readiness for missions that only the armed forces can perform. Washington is asking too much of its citizen soldiers.

Governors and state legislatures control when and how their National Guard is used. They can reclaim their units for their intended functions by drawing bright lines around law-enforcement-style deployments, especially in other jurisdictions. If the White House requests that governors send their National Guard on missions that involve controlling nonviolent protests, providing a show-of-force presence, or augmenting routine policing, the presumed answer should be "no." When National Guard support is genuinely necessary, state leaders must insist that federal missions be bound by clear conditions and objectives, with public and transparent guidance on matters such as how and when force can be used and how long a deployment will last.

The president could choose to override state leadership and federalize the Guard. But in that case, absent a true emergency, governors of both parties across the country should show solidarity with one another by refusing to voluntarily contribute troops, and Congress must assert its authority and vote to end the deployments quickly.

The National Guard has become the “force of first resort” for leaders at both the state and federal levels, in part because of chronic underinvestment in civilian institutions. Rebuilding those systems—schools, sanitation, public health, local law enforcement—is the hard, unglamorous work of governing. But doing so is the only way to preserve the National Guard’s emergency role and strengthen the democracy it exists to protect.

The National Guard is a powerful force when it arrives on a disaster scene to save lives, but an uneasy one when it is turned against civilians. Most of its members are motivated by service, not ideology. Misusing the Guard to manage political or social conflict will weaken its capacity to be what it is meant to be—a lifesaving, community-based force of last resort.

About the Author

Christopher Purdy is the founder and CEO of the Chamberlain Network, an organization that empowers veterans to defend democracy in their communities. He is an Iraq War veteran who served in the Army National Guard from 2004 to 2012.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2025/08/what-we-lose-misusing-national-guard/684070/>

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Depew National Guard soldier receives new rank

Bee News, Sept. 4, 2025 :

Alexander Mutter from Depew, assigned to C Troop, 2nd Squadron, 101st Cavalry Regiment, received a promotion to staff sergeant during the month of August.

Army National Guard promotions are based on a soldier’s overall performance, demonstrated leadership abilities, professionalism and future development potential. These promotions recognize the best qualified soldiers for a career in the New York Army National Guard.

The New York National Guard (New York State Division of Military and Naval Affairs) is the state's executive agency responsible to the governor for managing New York's military forces.

https://www.beenews.com/lancaster_bee/news/depew-national-guard-soldier-receives-new-rank/article_2d39fc53-b676-4ed5-934d-83e52a105e08.html

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Local pair receive promotions in New York Army National Guard

Rome Sentinel, Sept. 4, 2025 :

LATHAM — Two area residents have received promotions in the New York Army National Guard, according to an announcement by Major Gen. Ray Shields, adjutant general for New York, in recognition of their capability for additional responsibility and leadership.

They are:

Jacqueline Bonefede, of Rome, assigned to the Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 108th Infantry Regiment, promoted to sergeant first class; and

David Sandoval De La Merced, of Utica, assigned to the Company B, NY Recruiting & Retention Battalion, promoted to specialist.

Army National Guard promotions are based on a soldier's overall performance, demonstrated leadership abilities, professionalism and future development potential.

The New York National Guard (New York State Division of Military and Naval Affairs) is the state's executive agency responsible for managing New York's Military Forces, which consists of nearly 20,000 members of the New York Army National Guard, the New York Air National Guard, the New York Naval Militia and the New York Guard.

For more information about the New York Army National Guard, visit www.dmna.ny.gov or www.1800goguard.com.

https://www.romesentinel.com/entertainment-life/notices/advancements/local-pair-receive-promotions-in-new-york-army-national-guard/article_88b74819-5911-4269-bb15-ce6291b01040.html

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Piscataway Soldier Promoted in New York Army National Guard

Tapintotowns, Sept, 3, 2025 :

PISCATAWAY, NJ – Elton Brown of Piscataway has been promoted to private first class in the New York Army National Guard.

Brown, who serves with Company A, New York Recruiting and Retention Battalion, received the new rank on Aug. 7, according to an announcement from Major General Ray Shields, the adjutant general for the state of New York.

National Guard officials said promotions are based on a soldier's performance, leadership abilities, professionalism and potential for future development.

The New York Army National Guard is part of the state's Division of Military and Naval Affairs, which oversees nearly 20,000 members of the Army and Air National Guard, the New York Naval Militia and the New York Guard.

<https://www.tapinto.net/towns/piscataway/sections/community-life/articles/piscataway-soldier-promoted-in-new-york-army-national-guard>

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