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## **DOCCS Support**

### **A futile Prison Strike**

**Syracuse.com, March 18, 2025 :**

The wildcat strike by New York corrections officers is over after more than three weeks. What an exercise in law-breaking and futility — and a costly one, at that.

About 12,000 corrections officers walked off the job — in violation of the law against public employee strikes — to protest mandatory overtime and restrictions on the use of solitary confinement under the Humane Alternatives to Long-term Solitary Confinement Act. The HALT Act makes their jobs unsafe, they say.

The HALT Act has existed since 2022. Guards ratified their last union contract in 2023. Could it be the guards were angry about the arrests of 10 of their colleagues on murder and other charges in the beating death of Robert Brooks at Marcy Correctional Facility in early December? The timing of the strike does not look like a coincidence to us.

Gov. Kathy Hochul had few cards to play, as the strike was not sanctioned by the union and the strikers were flouting a court order to end the walkout. To induce strikers to come back to work, she offered some minor concessions: a commission to study the HALT Act, restoration of health benefits that were suspended during the strike, and a temporary overtime pay bump. By no means did strikers get everything on their long list of demands.

Both sides declared victory. It was a Pyrrhic one.

About 10,000 corrections officers returned to work but Hochul fired 2,000 who did not return by her deadline. That's 2,000 fewer people to work in prisons that are already understaffed. The deployment of 6,500 National Guard members to fill in for the strikers cost state taxpayers \$3.5 million a day during the strike. An unknown number of National Guard personnel remain at the prisons to backfill vacant positions.

We have little sympathy for the corrections officers who were fired. They violated the law against walking off the job and abrogated their duty to protect both the public and the inmates in their care. At least nine inmates died during the strike.

You can bet the public would have been up in arms if it had been teachers on strike rather than prison guards.

As for the HALT Act, a commission can study it until the cows come home. The state Legislature passed the law to end the practice of keeping prisoners in solitary confinement for weeks and months at a time, a practice considered torture by human rights experts. Corrections officers will find lawmakers have little appetite to repeal it

<https://www.syracuse.com/opinion/2025/03/short-takes-a-futile-prison-strike-a-slumlord-lawsuit-a-lost-season-editorial-board-opinion.html>

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**Hochul excited about 'redoing our prison system' post-strike as advocates fume over HALT program suspension (video)**

Spectrum News, March 18, 2025 :

Gov. Kathy Hochul said Tuesday that she is “excited” about efforts which she described as “redoing our prison system” in the wake of a three-week illegal strike by correction officers across the state.

The governor’s response to the strike may have ultimately sent 75% of officers back to work after days of back and forth, but it has infuriated advocates for the HALT Act as certain aspects of the law, which limits the use of solitary confinement and replaces aspects of it with rehabilitative programming, remain on a 90-day suspension. The governor blamed that suspension in part on the 25% of officers who refused to return.

“That has unfortunately been suspended because I am now down not just the original 2,000 correction officers, but we have an additional 2,000,” she said referring to existing staffing issues that fueled the strike. “I’m going to keep the National Guard there for a while but I want to rethink the whole system.”

Ending HALT was a primary demand of the strikers because of the unsafe conditions they say are created by limiting solitary confinement, but in reality the programming pause had more to do with addressing staffing issues than those concerns.

As Hochul spoke across town, advocates and several Democratic lawmakers gathered at the state Capitol to express their frustration with the governor over the suspension.

“The Department of Corrections can double down all they want on suspensions, on breaking the law,” said Jerome Wright, co-director of the HALT Solitary Campaign. “But HALT is the law, and that’s what we want to follow.”

Beyond that 90-day pause, the state also agreed to the possibility of further suspension when staffing drops below a certain level, and a committee to study aspects of the law before making recommendations to the Legislature.

Advocates have accused the governor of giving up on elements of a law they say wasn’t fully implemented in the first place, as a 2022 inspector general report found.

State Sen. Julia Salazar told Spectrum News 1 that while she understands the current staffing situation post-strike makes transporting individuals to and from programming a challenge, the fact that the situation in DOCCS facilities has deteriorated to such a degree underscores the need for expanded oversight.

The governor and both houses have included language expand oversight through the New York State Commission of Correction in their budget proposals.

“All of this together is very important for us to monitor conditions in the facilities, make sure all components of the HALT Solitary Confinement Act are implemented, despite the staffing challenges,” she said.

Advocates also insisted that the governor and DOCCS Commissioner Dan Martuscello don't have the authority to suspend HALT programming. Salazar indicated that while the commissioner and the executive do have the authority to suspend portions of HALT under emergency situations, she isn't convinced that proper protocols have been followed.

"It needs to be documented, it needs to be justified, and I don't think we are adequately seeing that right now, but that just underscores the importance of oversight," she said.

On Tuesday, the governor affirmed her long-term commitment to the programming aspects of HALT as they remain on hold while she undertakes a massive hiring effort.

"It's important to me that people have the opportunity while they are there to emerge from this incarceration with more skills, or as an individual who is less likely to commit crimes again," she said.

At the same time, she also touted concessions to the correction officers in a post-strike era, including efforts to reduce contraband reaching facilities through the mail reached as part of the deal that sent striking officers back to work.

"We're going to bring on a separate contractor to actually look at this, not to read the mail, but if there's something illegal, send it back," she said.

The governor has proposed further reforms to the prison system through the state budget, including closing up to five more facilities and consolidating incarcerated individuals, and mandating that body cams be worn at all times within facilities. The Senate and Assembly have adopted variations of those proposals in their one-house budgets, though the Assembly limited the governor to three facilities in addition to two last year. Hochul also proposed expanding programs that contribute to earned merit time, which the Senate adopted but the Assembly did not.

It comes as Republican lawmakers, who have stood by striking officers in their quest to repeal HALT, sent a letter to the governor requesting that she rescind an executive order barring those who were terminated from state jobs and making it harder for them to get local ones.

"If any organization had done what she has done to blacklist employees, particularly employees who were treated poorly, they would be met with hellfire from the Department of Labor, but instead it's okay because Kathy Hochul did it," said state Sen. George Borrello.

The governor clarified that certain aspects of that executive order having to do with local jobs expire after 30 days, but she encouraged local governments to keep in mind the illegal nature of the strike.

"They're only in effect until April 9," the governor said of the restrictions on local hiring. "If these people want to go work for local law enforcement that's their prerogative, but I would remind everybody I'd be very cautious because these individuals had a responsibility to

protect the public and the incarcerated population and they walked off the job for 22 days many of them.”

<https://spectrumlocalnews.com/nys/central-ny/politics/2025/03/18/hochul-excited-about-prison-reforms->

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## **Guardsmen face “awful” conditions “mentally and physically” in NY prisons**

**National Guard and Reserve Magazine, March 14, 2015 ::**

As New York State correctional officers return to work following the official end of the wildcat strike, more than 6,000 New York Army National Guard soldiers and airmen remain in state prisons on an involuntary order to maintain operations.

Reports of challenging work conditions for guardsmen in the prisons spread shortly after they were called up on Feb. 17, 2025, to serve as a backfill for thousands of striking correctional officers. The officers illegally walked off the job largely in protest of the HALT Act, a New York state law limiting the use of solitary confinement to a maximum of 17 days, which the New York State Correctional Officers and Police Benevolent Association said created an unsafe working environment.

Guardsmen soon learned firsthand how difficult the working environment in the prisons could be.

“It was 12 hours on, 12 hours off, nonstop for two weeks,” said one guardsman assigned to Cossackie Greene County Correctional Facility. According to the guardsman, who asked to speak on the condition of anonymity, they were not allowed to exit the facility for the initial two weeks of their tour. They slept in prison cell blocks and used the prisoners’ metal toilets and freezing cold showers.

“We ate prison food until so many people got food poisoning that we had to get a vendor that was no better to cater to us,” he said. Their 12-hour shifts were bookended by debriefs and summaries, allowing them only 10 hours off to eat, sleep and clean the prison units. The guardsman described his experience at the prison over the last three weeks as “really awful mentally and physically.”

“When soldiers and airmen first reported for duty, they were living in the prisons in austere conditions,” acknowledged Eric Durr, director of public affairs for the New York State Division of Military and Naval Affairs (DMNA).

But, according to Durr, the DMNA has since attempted to improve the situation for National Guard personnel, including moving them into outside lodging when possible, instituting

respite breaks to allow leave from their assigned facilities to visit their families, and providing improved internet access, snacks and bottled water.

The soldiers on duty have received a special duty pay allowance of \$2,000 per pay period, which will now be reduced to \$1,000 per pay period as the National Guard transitions to a long-term mission. There is currently no official date for when they will switch from an involuntary state active duty to a voluntary force. The 106th Regional Training Institute has launched week-long training sessions for long-term volunteers to handle the challenges of the mission.

New York Gov. Kathy Hochul declared the strike over on Monday, March 10, 2025, following the implementation of an agreement between the state and the Benevolent Association. New York agreed to suspend the rules of the HALT Act for 90 days, with a pledge to form a committee that would recommend ways for the legislature to amend the act within the next 60 days.

The agreement originally required 85% of striking workers to return to their posts by Monday morning, but Daniel Martuscello III, commissioner of the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, chose to implement the terms of the agreement when 75% of the officers returned to work. The state now has 10,000 available personnel, a reduction from the 13,500 prior to the strike.

The returning correctional officers have had their jobs and health insurance returned but may still face penalties for violating the Taylor Law, which prohibits public officials from striking. Hochul terminated 2,000 workers who refused to return to work on Monday and blacklisted them from future state employment.

<https://reservenationalguard.com/reserve-guard-news/guardsmen-face-awful-conditions-mentally-and-physically-in-ny-prisons/>

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## **Pregnant and fired -- many correction officers were on medical leave**

**Times Union, March 16, 2025 ::**

ALBANY — More than 2,000 state correction officers who were fired after being accused of declining to return to work at the end of an illegal strike included dozens of employees who were injured, sick, on family medical leave and, in at least one case, pregnant.

Many of those officers are pursuing grievances seeking reinstatement to their positions — as well as the restoration of their health insurance coverage — in a process that involves both the state Department of Corrections and Community Supervision and the New York State Correctional Officers & Police Benevolent Association, the union representing about 13,000 correction officers.

Jerri Cottrell, a mother of two young girls who had been a correction officer at Auburn Correctional Facility in Cayuga County, left work in February due to a hip injury that she said required her to provide the department with a doctor's note within 30 days. But before that clock ran out, Cottrell said, she was called back to work and fired on March 11 — two weeks before she is scheduled to give birth to a son.

Her husband, also a correction officer, resigned in protest after his wife was terminated but has since returned to work, in part, Cottrell said, because they need to support their family, including two young daughters. They, like thousands of other correction officers, also were told their health insurance was cancelled, she said.

“I wasn't actively on the (strike) line or anything, because I'm crippled and due in 12 days, and have two kids at home anyway, but my husband was actively striking, because everything in the prison is — it's just absolute shambles,” said Cottrell, who was a correction officer for seven years.

She said her husband had participated in the strike, and that she supported him because of the unsafe working conditions in the facilities that have been building for years. Officers also have been mandated to work mandatory shifts of 16 or 24 hours — sometimes longer — and were being prohibited from taking regularly scheduled days off. There has also been a surge in assaults in prisons and the correctional union has attributed that, in part, to a law prohibiting long-term solitary confinement.

On March 7, three days before state officials declared the strike was over and fired 2,000 correction officers, the correctional officers' union filed a lawsuit challenging the state's cancellation of its striking members' health care coverage, asserting that the decision violated their collective bargaining agreement, Civil Service Law and due process rights.

The union's petition was filed on behalf of its members and Eleasha Bieger, who has been a correction officer for 17 years and was on approved sick leave for a hand injury that requires surgery when her health insurance was terminated by the state, “causing her surgery to be canceled,” the complaint states.

“Despite not participating in the strike, she was ordered to return to work, and when she did not comply due to her disabling medical condition, she was threatened with being marked absent without leave (‘AWOL’), making her a direct victim of (the state's) unlawful and arbitrary actions,” the petition states.

The union's lawsuit, pending in state Supreme Court in Albany, alleges that the department issued a blanket designation classifying employees who were participating in the strike as absent without leave. But the state included any officers who were absent, even if they had excused leave.

“This includes employees on workers' compensation leave, sick leave, personal leave, vacation leave, leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), and paid parental leave,” the union's petitions states. “Additionally, DOCCS is applying the same AWOL



designation to employees who requested these forms of leave during the strike and have not returned to duty.”

Timothy Navarra, a correction officer since 2016 who worked at Wyoming Correctional Facility near Buffalo, filed his own lawsuit on March 4 challenging his termination two days earlier after he had been ordered to return to work. His claim, which is pending, states that he was fired despite having been on approved leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act for injuries sustained in a motorcycle accident in February.

The union, which is seeking a temporary injunction to restore all of their members' health insurance, alleges the department had terminated and cancelled the policies of officers whose absences were “necessary” and “legally protected.”

Thomas Mailey, a spokesman for the corrections department, acknowledged that there have been cases of officers who were on approved leave being terminated. He said a “review is ongoing on a case-by-case (basis).”

'Consequences when people break the law'

The union, in its civil petition, said the fallout for many officers and their families has been financially devastating and that the cancellation of their health insurance was done without proper notice to the employees or a hearing.

The “members and their families rely on employer-provided health insurance for life-sustaining medications such as insulin for diabetes, blood pressure medication for hypertension, and immunosuppressants for organ transplant recipients,” they union’s petition states. “Pregnant NYSCOPBA members and spouses currently receiving prenatal care will experience disruptions in essential medical visits and procedures, jeopardizing maternal and fetal health. ... Some members are undergoing ongoing chemotherapy and radiation treatments for cancer, and the loss of coverage would result in delayed or discontinued treatment, exacerbating serious medical conditions and reducing survival chances.”

They also noted that members who lost their health insurance may be required to pay expensive medical bills, including for emergency room visits and hospital stays.

Gov. Kathy Hochul has said the firing of the officers and canceling the health insurance of those who took part in the strike was justified.

“There are 2,000 people who refused the multiple, multiple, multiple efforts we had to resolve this over a three-week period,” Hochul said last week. “It has been all-consuming; it has been wildly expensive for taxpayers — approaching \$100 million — it created a very dangerous situation which I called out from the second day. ... There are consequences when people break the law, and that means you’re not working in our state workforce, ever.”

An executive order signed Monday by Hochul requires the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision to report the officers who were terminated to the state Division of

Criminal Justice Services as having been removed from their position “for cause,” which means their peace officer certification will be terminated.

In addition, the corrections department was directed to provide the governor’s Office of Employee Relations a list of the names of those officers so they will be blocked from seeking employment with other state agencies, as well as counties, where many had sought new jobs with local jails and sheriffs' departments.

The action by Hochul followed a 22-day strike that hobbled the state correctional system and prompted her to activate the New York National Guard to help fill security and operational positions at understaffed prisons. State Police also had to help with perimeter security at certain state prisons, many of which were operating with about 25 percent of their regular workforce during the strike.

“It is unfortunate that many members, who were off for legitimate reasons such as family medical leave or job-related injuries, were part of the blanket termination of 2,000 staff by DOCCS last week,” said Jimmy Miller, a spokesman for the correctional officers union. “We are committed to getting those members who were wrongfully terminated reinstated immediately.”

Corrections Commissioner Daniel F. Martuscello declared the strike was over on March 10 and said roughly 5,000 of the remaining officers on strike had returned to duty. By then, a few hundred officers who had ignored the deadline to return to work that day sought help from their union and said they wanted their jobs back. But the governor’s executive order has blocked that from happening.

The return of more than 5,000 correction officers and sergeants has still left the state prison system short-staffed. Martuscello said thousands of National Guard troops will continue to be deployed in the facilities to augment security and operations as an aggressive campaign to hire new officers is launched.

The return of those roughly 5,000 officers put the state’s correctional workforce at about 10,000, which includes sergeants, but is still about 4,000 officers short of the staffing levels in place before the strike began on Feb. 17.

Martuscello said that although the provisions of a labor agreement the state made with the correctional officers union was contingent on at least 85% of striking correction officers returning to duty — a threshold that was not met — he would still honor most of the tenets of an earlier labor agreement for those that did return.

But that state took a harder line on the health insurance cancellations, saying that officers who walked off the job could have their policies retroactively reinstated, but those officers would have to pay the “Cobra” rate for that period.

<https://www.timesunion.com/capitol/article/fired-ny-correction-officers-include-injuries-20219121.php>

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## **After the strike, New York state prisons are even more short-staffed than before (audio)**

NPR, March 15, 2025 ::

### Transcript

The state of New York was short on corrections officers before a strike among their ranks. The governor is now barring 2,000 strikers from returning to work.

SCOTT SIMON, HOST:

New York state's prison system is reeling after a three-week unsanctioned strike by corrections officers. That ended about a week ago, and on Monday, Governor Kathy Hochul fired 2,000 prison guards for not returning to work. As NPR's Martin Kaste reports, that leaves the system even more short-staffed and increases worries about safety.

MARTIN KASTE, BYLINE: The wildcat strike started in mid-February, and one of the guards' main complaints was a state law passed in 2021 known as the HALT Act. It restricts the use of solitary confinement. But at a press conference by guards' spouses during the strike, Bernadette Singer said that law was making it harder to isolate dangerous inmates.

BERNADETTE SINGER: Officers do not want to treat people badly. They understand that the point of prison is for rehabilitation. That is not the choice that they have anymore.

KASTE: To end the strike, the state agreed to suspend HALT for 90 days. That's angered activists such as Anisah Sabur who experienced a month of solitary when she was in prison.

ANISAH SABUR: I call it a box. It's not even as big as an elevator. Lock yourself in your bathroom for 23 hours with no contact. Somebody opens a slide in your door, shove a tray in it, and that's it.

KASTE: Sabur and the HALT solitary campaign called the wildcat strike a, quote, "smoke screen" to distract attention from the fatal beating in December of an inmate named Robert Brooks. That incident was caught on video, and 10 guards were indicted in February, around the time the strike started.

JENNIFER SCAIFE: There's a - absolutely a systematic abuse of power and contempt toward incarcerated people, exhibited not by all staff but by too many.

KASTE: Jennifer Scaife is executive director of the Correctional Association of New York, a state-sanctioned prison watchdog group. She says it's true that many officers are under a lot of pressure with long shifts and mandatory overtime - something that's not helped by the firing of the 2,000 officers. She says most prisons still are not allowing visits even though the wildcat strike has been over for a week.

SCAIFE: Even though they're back, they're not necessarily happy to be back. They didn't get fully what they wanted. The system is going to be experiencing pain for quite some time.

KASTE: The governor is proposing to improve conditions by closing more prisons. The state's inmate population has dropped a lot since the '90s, and consolidation would make it easier to deploy the remaining 10,000 guards more efficiently. But closures are controversial, especially in more rural areas where prisons are major employers. Martin Kaste, NPR News, New York.

<https://www.npr.org/2025/03/15/nx-s1-5327232/after-the-strike-new-york-state-prisons-are-even-more-short-staffed-than-before>

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## **Officials extend state facility inmate intake freeze; Monroe County Jail faces backlog**

WHAM, March 17, 2025 ::

Rochester, N.Y. — County jails are facing a backlog after the statewide corrections officer strike ended earlier this month.

The state's Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) said it extended its cancellation of inmate intake through the end of March.

As a result, there's currently 82 incarcerated people still in the Monroe County Jail who should have been transferred to state facilities.

Officers across the state went on strike for three weeks, demanding better working conditions and an end to the HALT Act.

That strike led to the deployment of National Guard members to fill gaps in staffing.

According to the state's Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS), the strike ended after a memorandum of agreement was reached a week ago and more than 2,000 workers were fired.

In the meantime, 30 state correctional facilities opened back up to visitation Monday.

<https://13wham.com/news/local/monroe-county-jail-faces-overcrowding-as-inmate-transfers-stall-after-strike-doccs-new-york-state-prison-corrections-officer-co>

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## **Oneida County filing lawsuit against New York State for hiring ban on fired correction officers**

WSYR, March 17, 2025 ::

ONEIDA COUNTY, N.Y. (WSYR-TV) — Oneida County Executive Anthony Picente released on Monday, March 17, that the county will be filing a lawsuit against New York State over the ban on hiring fired correction officers for government positions within the state.

Gov. Kathy Hochul announced the ban on hiring the fired state correction officers who did not return from striking on Tuesday, March 12.

The executive order from the governor bans the fired officers from any state job, removes their names from the state registry that verifies an officer's training and temporarily bans local governments from hiring them for any job.

Picente says the governor's order is a violation of the fired officers' right and a violation home rule for local governments.

The motion will be filed within the next 48 hours and then Oneida County will hire as many of the former officers as possible to fill vacancies in the sheriffs office and other county departments, Picente said.

<https://www.yahoo.com/news/oneida-county-filing-lawsuit-against-193453626.html>

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## **DOCCS updates legal visitation, extends cancellation of prisoner intake through end of month**

WROC, March 17, 2025 ::

ROCHESTER, N.Y. (WROC) — The New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) announced Monday on its social media pages the rollout of legal visitation reopening at some state prisons. This comes following the announcement

one week ago from DOCCS that the illegal prison guard strikes were over after reaching a fresh deal with the union representing guards, New York State Correctional Officers and Police Benevolent Association (NYSCOBPA).

During the announcement of the strike ending, DOCCS Commissioner, Dan Martuscello, noted that more than 2,000 correction officers were being issued termination letters, thus, compounding an already severely understaffed sector. On Monday, a DOCCS spokesperson confirmed to News 8 the agency informed county jails officials are extending the cancellation of intakes through Monday, March 31st "...and we'll reevaluate as we continue to restore operations at our facilities."

News 8 checked in with local sheriff offices in our region to learn about the current impact this is having on county jails: Ontario County has one incarcerated person awaiting transfer, Wayne County has 10 individuals, and the greatest impact is the Monroe County jail with 82 inmates awaiting transfer to state facilities.

During the strike, which was not sanctioned by NYSCOBPA, Governor Kathy Hochul ordered National Guard members to step in to help offset the impacts of thousands of COs protesting working conditions, including 24-hour mandatory overtime shifts (something the new agreement reads as "minimizing and working towards eliminating 24-hour mandatory overtime"). Following the announcement of the strike ending, Hochul issued an Executive Order barring COs who remained on the picket lines from obtaining any other state job.

On February 20, three days after the illegal strikes began, DOCCS announced visitation is canceled at all facilities until further notice. As of Monday, March 17th, 30 of the state prisons are open to legal visitation once again, some of which include Attica, Groveland, and Wyoming. Nine other facilities will have legal visitation reopening within the next 1 -2 weeks. Three locations, Bare Hill, Sing Sing, and Upstate are listed as 'indeterminate' for any legal visits at this point and time.

<https://www.rochesterfirst.com/news/doccs-updates-legal-visitation-extends-cancellation-of-prisoner-intake-through-end-of-month/>

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## **Federal Government**

### **Civil War Nurses, USS Constitution Commander Among Female Veterans Removed in Pentagon DEI Sweep**

Military.com, March 17, 2025 ::

Women veterans from the Civil War, World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War are not exempt from Defense Department's sweep of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) efforts within the U.S. military. These breakthrough stories of women in combat are the latest prey of the Pentagon's effort to scrub its servers of what the Trump administration has called "discrimination programs."

In January 2025, President Donald Trump issued an executive order aimed at the departments of Defense and Homeland Security titled "Restoring America's Fighting Force," which removed DEI offices from the uniformed services. That order came just days after another order that forced the military to remove anything related to any kind of diversity effort.

The days that followed saw some surprising erasures from DoD websites, including Medal of Honor recipients Pfc. Harold Gonsalves and Maj. Gen. Charles C. Rogers. For a time, the Army website honoring the famed all-Japanese 442nd Regimental Combat Team from World War II, the service's most decorated unit, was also scrubbed (it has since been restored following a public outcry).

The U.S. military has long been a cultural and political leader in recognizing civil rights, irrespective of race, gender or orientation, lauded for removing restrictions on each year before the rest of the United States. It has also been a leader in celebrating its multicultural heritage and recognizing important firsts. The Trump administration's anti-DEI efforts appear to have forced the DoD to systematically remove those recognitions despite any heroism inherent in these military stories. Women's history is just the latest casualty.

### Civil War Nurses

A 2024 DoD News article from writer Katie Lange told the story of 23 female nurses who served on the front lines of the Civil War who are now interred at Arlington National Cemetery. At the outbreak of the Civil War, Congress authorized the Army to hire female nurses at a time when nursing was a male-dominated profession. Women began volunteering in both official and non-official capacities. Some worked for the duration of the war and even drew veterans pensions in the decades that followed.

Anna Platt worked at the 1,000-bed war hospital in Washington's Armory Square, working day and night to care for the wounded. Adelaide Spurgeon worked in the one hospital for smallpox patients, risking her life to comfort them. Caroline Burghardt worked on the front lines, including the battles of Antietam and Gettysburg. Sarah E. Thompson was caught behind enemy lines and led Union troops back to capture a rebel general.

Though removed from Defense Department servers and its URL changed to label it as "DEI", the DoD story of Arlington National Cemetery's Civil War women has been syndicated elsewhere and can still be found on the Internet Archive Wayback Machine.

### The First Woman to Command the USS Constitution

The USS Constitution, first launched in 1797, is the oldest commissioned warship still afloat and the only current U.S. Navy ship to have sunk an enemy warship in combat. Every year, more than 500,000 tourists still visit the Constitution to see the old girl and watch the old-timey traditions of their Navy. To command the 44-gun frigate is a big deal and when Cmdr. Billie Farrell took command as the first woman to hold the position, it was an even bigger deal.

Farrell had served aboard more modern ships, of course. She was on guided-missile cruisers USS Vella Gulf, USS San Jacinto and USS Vicksburg before taking command of Old Ironsides. Katie Lange wrote about the historic command for a DoD News' "Making History" feature on March 25, 2022, but the story is now taken down, its URL also labeled "DEI." It can also be found syndicated and on the Wayback Machine.

### All-Women Veterans Honor Flight

The first all-woman Honor Flight out of Chicago flew 93 female veterans to visit Washington, the national memorials and the Arlington National Cemetery on Oct. 6, 2021. (Honor Flight Chicago)

On Oct. 6, 2021, Operation HerStory and Honor Flight Chicago flew 93 women veterans from World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War to visit Washington, D.C., and see their respective war memorials, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and other important sites.

"In my 99 years, I have never been so overtaken with emotion," said Bette Horstman, a World War II Army veteran who served as a medical officer on Midway Island and other parts of the Pacific Campaign. "You have a camaraderie; you share something that the average neighbor doesn't have. We all went through similar experiences."

The veterans and the 200 volunteers who helped them on this once-in-a-lifetime event made national news, but the Department of Defense has labeled it "DEI" and erased writer Crista Mary Mack's story from its archives. Luckily, nothing on the internet ever truly goes away and the DoD News story is saved on the Internet Archive Wayback Machine.

<https://www.military.com/history/civil-war-nurses-uss-constitution-commander-among-female-veterans-removed-pentagon-dei-sweep.html>

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### **For Information**

### **Pentagon restores a few webpages honoring servicemembers but still defends DEI purge**

Associated Press, March 17, 2025 ::



*Note: This item is being provided for informational purposes.*

The Pentagon said Monday that internet pages honoring a Black Medal of Honor winner and Japanese American service members were mistakenly taken down — but staunchly defended its overall campaign to strip out content singling out the contributions by women and minority groups, which the Trump administration considers “DEI.”

A Defense Department webpage honoring Black Medal of Honor recipient Army Maj. Gen. Charles Calvin Rogers was taken down last week. The department actually temporarily changed the web address to insert “deimedal-of-honor”, which then led to a “404 - Page not found” message, according to a screenshot captured by the Internet Archive on March 15.

A U.S. official said the website was mistakenly taken down during an automated removal process.

But it’s not the only one. Thousands of pages honoring contributions by women and minority groups have been taken down in efforts to delete material promoting diversity, equity and inclusion — a step that Pentagon spokesman Sean Parnell defended at a briefing Monday.

“I think the president and the secretary have been very clear on this — that anybody that says in the Department of Defense that diversity is our strength is, is frankly, incorrect,” Parnell said. “Our shared purpose and unity are our strength. And I say this as somebody who led a combat platoon in Afghanistan that was probably the most diverse platoon that you could possibly imagine.”

But it isn’t resonating that way with veterans or communities who honor those groups — and raises questions as to whether the administration’s fixation on getting rid of images that highlight the contributions of women, minorities and members of the LGBTQ community will ultimately backfire and hurt recruiting. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and President Donald Trump have already removed the only female four-star officer on the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Navy Adm. Lisa Franchetti, and removed its Black Chairman, Gen. CQ Brown Jr.

“The full throttled attack on Black leadership, dismantling of civil rights protections, imposition of unjust anti-DEI regulations, and unprecedented historical erasure across the Department of Defense is a clear sign of a new Jim Crow being propagated by our Commander in Chief,” said Richard Brookshire, co-CEO of the Black Veterans Project, a nonprofit advocating for the elimination of racial inequities among uniformed service members.

Rogers, a native of Fire Creek, West Virginia, was awarded the Medal of Honor in 1970 by then-President Richard Nixon, becoming the highest-ranking Black service member to receive the country’s greatest military honor. He was wounded three times while serving in Vietnam. Rogers joined the U.S. Army in 1951, six months before the racial desegregation of the U.S. military.

He remained outspoken throughout his life about the discrimination Black service members faced. In a 1975 interview with the Daily Press in Newport News, Virginia, Rogers described how difficult it was for them to rise into leadership positions and said the struggle for equal treatment in the military wasn't over. "We still have and will have what the Department of Defense describes as institutional racism," he said.

The story of Rogers' web page removal was first reported by The Guardian. It was back online Monday night.

Another page that was removed featured the World War II Japanese-American 442nd Regimental Combat Team, U.S. Army spokesperson Christopher Surrudge said Monday.

According to the Army, the 4,000 men who made up the unit were mostly American-born children of Japanese immigrants, known as Nisei soldiers. Their losses were so great the whole unit had to be replaced nearly 3.5 times, according to the Army. In total, about 14,000 men served, ultimately earning 9,486 Purple Hearts, 21 Medals of Honor and an unprecedented eight Presidential Unit Citations.

But their story was removed "in accordance with a Presidential Executive Order and guidance from the Secretary of Defense" when the service took down a website celebrating Asian American and Pacific Islander heritage.

"The Army is tirelessly working through content on that site and articles related to the 442nd Infantry Regiment and Nisei Soldiers will be republished to better align with current guidance," Surrudge said in a statement. "The Army remains committed to sharing the stories of our Soldiers, their units, and their sacrifice."

The mostly Japanese American segregated unit was highly decorated despite facing prejudice after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor. After the removal of the 442nd page was reported by the Honolulu Advertiser and other media outlets, the U.S. Army's website prominently displayed a page with a "spotlight" label Monday featuring the unit's history.

After Japan's Dec. 7, 1941, attack on Pearl Harbor, Japanese Americans were viewed with suspicion and initially prevented from enlisting for military service. Nearly 110,000 were sent to internment camps. Congress presented 442nd members and other Japanese American veterans of World War II its highest civilian honor — the Congressional Gold Medal — in 2011.

The erasure of the 442nd content also drew congressional ire. Democrat Hawaii Rep. Ed Case wrote Friday in a letter asking for the pages to be restored that "it is clear that the Army is intentionally removing these websites based solely on race without any consideration of or respect for historical context."

The Japanese American Citizens League also denounced the decision, calling it "an attempt to erase the legacy of thousands of soldiers who gave everything for a country that doubted them."

Bill Wright, whose father was an officer in the 442nd, said the page's removal is just one example of what's happening across Department of Defense websites reflective of current politics. "We don't have any control over that except at the ballot box," he said, adding that it won't deter him and others from continuing to educate people about the unit.

Mark Matsunaga, a former Honolulu journalist whose Japanese American father and uncles served in World War II, said he was grateful to see the 442nd's webpage restored, but that "one act doesn't solve the larger problem."

"They're still eliminating all kinds of content — photos, articles, social media posts — that all help Americans to understand how diverse their military is," he said. "Clearly this is part of an attempt to whitewash history."

<https://apnews.com/article/dei-military-website-department-of-defense-02673c3aa354f3191405fc9d7b249ab3>

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## **New York Air National Guard**

### **Space National Guard debate reignited with bipartisan legislation**

SpaceNews.Com, March 17, 2025 ::

WASHINGTON — A bipartisan push to establish a Space National Guard has resurfaced on Capitol Hill, challenging a compromise reached just months ago on how to structure the reserve component of America's newest military branch.

Senators Mike Crapo (R-Idaho) and John Hickenlooper (D-Colo.) introduced the Space Guard Establishment Act last week, seeking to create the Space National Guard as the official reserve component of the Space Force. On the House side, Representatives Jason Crow (D-Colo.) and Lauren Boebert (R-Colo.) introduced identical companion legislation.

The effort comes just months after Congress approved the Space Force Personnel Management Act, which eliminated the traditional distinction between active duty, Reserve, and Guard units. The law, passed as part of the Fiscal Year 2025 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), allows full- and part-time service members to operate within a single system, providing an alternative to establishing a separate National Guard component.

"A dedicated reserve component will make sure our National Guard space experts have a clear path to continue their service to community and country," said Hickenlooper in a statement supporting the new legislation.

Years-long tug of war

The fight over how to structure the reserve component of the Space Force started soon after the branch was created in 2019. While space operations personnel in the National Guard initially remained under Air Force leadership, the question of their proper organizational home became more pressing after the Air National Guard ceased performing space missions.

The central issue involves hundreds of space-focused Guard personnel currently serving in seven states: Alaska, California, Colorado, Florida, Hawaii, New York and Ohio. The National Guard Association of the United States, an advocacy group, has opposed the current arrangement, warning that surveys indicate most Air National Guard space professionals would not transfer to the active-duty Space Force under the existing framework.

#### Personnel Management Act vs. new proposal

The Space Force Personnel Management Act, passed by Congress in December and included in the FY2025 NDAA, created a flexible personnel system allowing both full-time and part-time service members to serve within a single component. The law permits the transfer of Air National Guard space units to the Space Force without requiring gubernatorial consent — a provision strongly opposed by governors and National Guard organizations.

The new legislation would effectively override this arrangement, creating a formal Space National Guard as the dedicated reserve component of the Space Force. Proponents argue this structure would better retain talent and leverage existing facilities.

#### Political dynamics shift

Proponents of the Space National Guard expect the Trump administration to support the new legislation. While the Biden administration opposed creating a separate Space National Guard organization, citing cost concerns, Trump expressed support for a separate Space Guard during his presidential campaign.

The bill has garnered additional bipartisan support from Senators Jim Risch (R-Idaho), Alex Padilla (D-Calif.), Marsha Blackburn (R-Tenn.), Michael Bennet (D-Colo), and Rick Scott (R-Fla.).

#### Path forward

Crow, a member of the House Armed Services Committee, emphasized that the legislation would require “no additional personnel, units, or facilities,” while allowing space specialists to continue supporting Space Force missions.

The push for a Space National Guard now faces a complex legislative path. Given that the Space Force Personnel Management Act was already signed into law, the new proposal will likely need to be reintroduced in the Fiscal Year 2026 NDAA.

<https://spacenews.com/space-national-guard-debate-reignited-with-bipartisan-legislation/>

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## **US Air Force returns from Antarctica after summer mission accomplished**

**Defense News, March 18, 2025 :**

CHRISTCHURCH, New Zealand — The last U.S. Air Force transport aircraft journeyed home on March 7 after a busy summer in Christchurch. From this New Zealand city, the Air Force made frequent flights to Antarctica in support of the National Science Foundation program there.

This year's summer program was notable for two reasons.

Firstly, the Air Force utilized a new aircraft platform – in addition to usual Lockheed Martin LC-130H Hercules “skibirds” and Boeing C-17A Globemaster IIIs – to fly to one of the world's most remote spots.

Lt. Col. Jack Smith, Commander of the 304th Expeditionary Airlift Squadron, Antarctic Operations, explained to Defense News why these C-130Hs of the Nevada Air National Guard put in an appearance, performing around ten missions to the frozen continent.

“There's a C-17 gap season, from about the 5th of December through the third week of January, where we don't operate because the runway gets too soft,” he said. “But the C-130 can start operating earlier because they're smaller and lighter, so that they have an option to move passengers north and south during those gap periods.”

While the C-17 can carry much more cargo, Smith explained the C-130Hs out of Reno are cheaper to operate too. “It's a small airplane, less fuel.” They are also more efficient than the LC-130, the world's largest ski-equipped aircraft. In fact, that plane's skis so badly affect aircraft aerodynamics that they consume 25% more fuel compared to a C-130H.

The second new aspect to this year's Operation Deep Freeze – the name given to Antarctic support operations that started in 1955 – was the effort to rebuild a pier at McMurdo Station where ships offload cargo and supplies. This saw the C-17s carrying heavy cargo such as cranes and big drilling rigs, explained Smith.

Navy Seabees are in charge of rebuilding this vital pier, which previously shattered in half and will take two years to construct. Bulk supplies and fuel arrive by icebreaker ships. Last year the U.S. moved 90 million pounds of cargo to the continent, of which 85 million arrived by sea.

Air Force aircraft brave harsh conditions to fly personnel, equipment and supplies to Antarctica. Describing the challenges of flying in this frigid environment, Smith said the weather was definitely the biggest headache. Conditions at McMurdo can change rapidly, or an aircraft may develop technical hitches.

This results in “boomerangs”, where an aircraft in midflight returns to Christchurch. “They reach a point, we call it a point of safe return, you get to that point and you have to make a decision based on the weather forecast,” Smith said.

The summer season lasts from the start of October through to early March. Smith explained, “So the LC-130s will be here pretty much that whole time operating, and they’re mostly doing intra-theater airlift,” shuttling between McMurdo Station and other ski ways in the south. Meanwhile, Smith said of the C-17s, “Our focus is Christchurch to and from McMurdo.”

He said there can also be communication challenges. “HF [high-frequency] radios may or may not work once you get pretty far south. So radio issues, getting weather forecast updates, sometimes can be a challenge.” Spatial disorientation is also possible if pilots cannot identify the horizon.

The only airfield where the heavy C-17s can land at is Phoenix at McMurdo, this being made from compacted ice. However, is landing and taking off on an ice runway challenging? “It’s not that different, to be honest,” Smith said. “It’s similar to a wet runway – so if the runway here in Christchurch is wet, that’s pretty similar to what we experience at Phoenix.”

Occasionally the aircraft might airdrop emergency supplies to the South Pole, but that did not happen on the summer rotation just completed.

A Hercules takes around 8 hours to reach Antarctica, compared to 5 hours for a C-17. Therefore, an average Globemaster mission to Antarctica and back is 16-18 hours. A typical C-17A flight crew is four pilots, four loadmasters and two flying crew chiefs. Smith said these flights also help upgrade and qualify crews.

C-17s performed 24 missions in October-November 2024, plus another eight in early 2025. One aircraft will also return to New Zealand do a couple of midwinter missions in August, when darkness rules in the deep south. At the peak, 5-8 Air Force flights south occur per week, including the Hercules.

Smith’s squadron is part of the 62nd Airlift Wing stationed at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash. The formation, and the LC-130s and C-130Hs, fall under jurisdiction of the Hickam, Hawaii-based Joint Task Force - Support Forces Antarctica while supporting Operation Deep Freeze.

Smith commanded 38 personnel on the C-17A side of the operation this year. The Air Force only selects qualified instructor pilots and instructor loadmasters for these missions. “We

want people who are already pretty experienced with C-17 operations, and then we allow home station squadrons to nominate who they send.”

Because so many personnel wish to participate, it is regarded as a commander’s incentive program. “They use it as kind of a reward to their top performers within their squadrons back home. So we build a team out of all the high performers each rotation from back at McChord. So it makes my job easy – I have a bunch of really, really talented folks working out here,” Smith enthused.

The New York Air National Guard’s ten ski-equipped LC-130H Hercules are getting long in the tooth, and a replacement is needed. According to an Air Force source, the replacement will likely be based on the C-130J. However, regular Air Force C-130Js cannot fly to Antarctica because American models do not possess wing fuel tanks.

New Zealand is not restricted in this way. The country’s air force has already flown its new C-130J-30s to Antarctica, because these have a longer-range fuel capacity thanks to wing tanks.

The Pentagon may be changing priorities for the military, but there is little chance of the Air Force’s role in Operation Deep Freeze being affected.

For scientists working in Antarctica, there is absolutely no other way of getting urgent supplies. This was illustrated when Smith, in one of the final flights of the season, captained an emergency C-17 mission to medically evacuate someone from McMurdo.

<https://www.defensenews.com/global/asia-pacific/2025/03/18/us-air-force-returns-from-antarctica-after-summer-mission-accomplished/>

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## **New York Air Wing Concludes Antarctic Science Support Season**

**NationalGuard.mil, By Jaclyn Lyons, 109th Air Wing, March 18, 2025 :**

SCOTIA, N.Y. - The New York Air National Guard’s 109th Airlift Wing moved 1,076 passengers, 900 tons of cargo and 120,000 gallons of fuel during its annual support for science in Antarctica from October to February.

The 109th executed 79 missions using its ski-equipped LC-130 Hercules aircraft, transporting personnel, cargo, and fuel to key research sites across the continent, including the Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station and a research station on the West Antarctic Ice Sheet.

The wing’s operations are part of Operation Deep Freeze, the Department of Defense’s annual mission to provide logistical support to the National Science Foundation in Antarctica.

Five aircraft and 400 Airmen deployed to McMurdo Station, the hub of U.S. operations in Antarctica, during the five-month support season.

The unit accomplished nine medical evacuations throughout the season.

One of these missions included a civilian logistics specialist who suffered a myocardial infarction. He was transported to Christchurch, New Zealand, where he was discharged and sent home to recover a week later.

The partnership between the National Science Foundation and the military was key to ensuring rapid medical care and evacuation of the patient, said Maj. Thomas Powell, the McMurdo Station flight surgeon.

The 109th faced challenging weather and complex logistical demands but completed missions safely and efficiently, said Col. Rob Donaldson, commander of the 109th Airlift Wing.

The 109th Airmen's efforts supported the NSF's studies in climate science, glaciology and environmental research.

"The dedication and professionalism of our mission-ready Airmen continue to be the backbone of this mission," Donaldson said. "From our pilots and aircrew to our maintainers and support personnel, every member of this team plays a crucial role in ensuring safe and effective operations in one of the most demanding environments on the planet."

As the Antarctic summer ends, the unit's personnel and aircraft have returned to Stratton Air National Guard Base in New York.

The wing will begin preparations for future missions, including science support missions in Greenland, which begin in April.

The wing also supports military operations. Aircraft and Airmen from the 109th recently participated in Canadian Forces exercise Operation Nanook-Nunaliut, where they built an ice runway and landed a C-130 on a frozen lake.

The 109th Airlift Wing is the only unit in the U.S. military with ski-equipped LC-130s, making it uniquely capable to support scientific and military missions in polar regions.

<https://www.nationalguard.mil/News/Article-View/Article/4123186/new-york-air-wing-concludes-antarctic-science-support-season/>

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## **NIMAC: 30 years since Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station faced closure**

**Niagara Frontier Publications, March 19, 2025 :**

*Guest Editorial by John A. Cooper Sr., Niagara Military Affairs Council Chairman*

This April marks 30 years since the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station first faced the threat of closure. In April 1995, the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Commission placed the base under review, launching a months-long process that would determine its future.

That moment served as a wake-up call for Western New York. The community quickly realized that protecting the base was not just a military concern, but a shared responsibility. Rallying together, local leaders, businesses and residents successfully fought to keep it open.



From that experience, Niagara Military Affairs Council (NIMAC) was formed with a clear mission: to support the growth and prosperity of the base and its personnel, ensuring a positive economic impact on the region.

For three decades, NIMAC volunteers – experts in business, military and government – have worked to promote and protect the base, collaborating closely with leadership from the 914th Air Refueling Wing (Air Force Reserve) and the 107th Attack Wing (New York Air National Guard).

Today, Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station remains the only federal Air Force base in New York state. Defending its future requires continued advocacy at the highest levels of government, strategic planning, and strong local partnerships.

Special thanks to our financial supporters, including the towns of Wheatfield, Niagara, Lewiston, Lockport and Cambria; the City of North Tonawanda; and Niagara and Erie counties. With ongoing support, we will ensure the base remains a vital part of our community for generations to come.

NIMAC is a nonprofit organization that works to support the growth and prosperity of the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station (NFARS) and its personnel, creating a positive economic impact on the Western New York community. Founded in 1996, NIMAC continues to support and promote capital investment by the federal government in the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station by increasing the NFARS visibility and calling attention to its attributes among key Department of Defense, congressional and military leaders.

NIMAC is an apolitical and Hatch Act-compliant organization allowing free communication between NIMAC and military leadership. For more information, visit [www.NIMAC.org](http://www.NIMAC.org).

<https://www.wnypapers.com/news/article/featured/2025/03/19/162578/nimac-30-years-since-niagara-falls-air-reserve-station-faced-closure>

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## **New York Guard Airmen Modernize C-17 Fleet with Microvanes**

**NationalGuard.mil, By Senior Airman Sarah Post, 105th Airlift Wing, March 19, 2025 :**

STEWART AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE, N.Y. - The 105th Airlift Wing is playing a key role in a modernization initiative for the U.S. Air Force C-17 Globemaster III fleet and has become the first base to permanently maintain the new, innovative technology on one of its aircraft.

In 2023, the Air National Guard C-17 weapons system manager requested volunteers to participate in a modernization initiative to test microvane drag reduction technology and its impacts on fuel efficiency. The 105th stepped up.

Microvanes are 3D printed devices, measuring about 4x16 inches and resembling a blade. When a dozen microvanes are installed on the rear of a C-17, they reduce drag and fuel consumption by 1%.

That 1% improvement in fuel efficiency may not sound significant, but it will save the Air Force over \$14 million annually.

Lt. Col. Eric Durkins, 105th Maintenance Squadron commander, said the technology will also directly enhance mission capability.

“The 105th has a strong track record of innovation and excellence in aircraft maintenance, making us a natural choice for testing and evaluating this modernization effort,” Durkins said.

There are three aircraft at Stewart ANGB with microvanes. One has gone through the final flight-testing phase, including air refueling and assault strip operations, to become the first permanent aircraft with microvanes. Durkins said this aircraft has supported worldwide missions, including a deployment, for over a year without issue.

The other two aircraft are participating in the logistics service assessment phase, along with a few other aircraft across the Air Force. After six months of testing in this phase, microvane use is intended to expand across the entire C-17 fleet.

Throughout the multiyear testing process, 105th Airmen have worked with other Airmen and agencies and learned about the maintenance and implementation of the microvane technology. These agencies and units include Air Mobility Command, the 164th Maintenance Group at Memphis Air National Guard Base, Tennessee, and Edwards Air Force Base, California.

“The microvanes initiative combines Stewart’s efforts to modernize Mobility Air Forces with innovative mission-ready Airmen,” said Durkins. “We paired up with Memphis Air National Guard Base during testing to increase process knowledge for Airmen across both wings. Our maintainers, working side by side with engineering teams from the start of this project, helped develop installation procedures for the whole C-17 enterprise.”

Durkins said the benefits of microvanes extend beyond improved fuel efficiency, as this technology will also increase mission capability. Aircraft can fly farther while carrying more cargo, ultimately strengthening operational readiness and maintaining the U.S. Air Force’s position as a leader in global air power.

<https://www.nationalguard.mil/News/Article-View/Article/4124708/new-york-guard-airmen-modernize-c-17-fleet-with-microvanes/>

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**Two Cheektowaga brothers enlisted in New York Air National Guard**

**Cheektowaga Bee, March 20, 2025 :**

James and Jamal Whitaker, were sworn into the New York Air National Guard on March 7, as the newest members of the 107th Attack Wing. The two will become members of the wing's Security Forces Squadron after completing basic training and technical school in early 2026. The Whitakers are 2021 and 2023 graduates of Tapestry Charter School in Buffalo. Beginning in April, James and Jamal will attend the 107th Attack Wing's student flight training program while awaiting basic training dates. As slots become available, they will attend Air Force Basic Military Training (BMT) for seven and a half weeks at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas. Following Airman Basic, they will attend the Air Force Security Forces Academy, which is also located at Lackland. They will receive 65 days of training in basic military police functions including law enforcement, security, and combat tactics. "I'm just really excited for all of it; the trials at basic, tech school, I definitely plan on college", James said. The Whitakers's parents, Jennifer and James Whitaker, have served with the Buffalo Police Department for 17 years, as detective and lieutenant, respectively.

"Since our parents have a lot of experience in law enforcement, that probably helped us lean toward security forces" James said.

For now, Security Forces is the first step in a Guard career full of potential, according to the brothers. "I'm definitely planning for a career here, stay for my 20 years. But honestly right now, one day at a time" Jamal said. James and Jamal took the oath of enlistment in the presence of their parents, aunts, uncles, and grandparents, who shared their pride and well wishes at the conclusion of the ceremony. "I'm just so proud of them to be able to do what they do and make this decision on their own," said father, James.

"We've got their back all the way, whatever or however role or avenue they want to travel," said Jennifer. "It's just a privilege and an honor to serve and to be here to witness our sons, our young kings, take on the same challenge and decision on their own, it's fantastic."

<https://www.cheektowagabee.com/articles/two-cheektowaga-brothers-enlisted-in-new-york-air-national-guard/>

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## **New York Army National Guard**

### **Bringing Medal of Honor Heroics to Life**

**Department of Defense, March 19, 2025:**

The Defense Department often partners with filmmakers to create accurate military portrayals, which is why we collaborated with streaming giant Netflix on a big venture: a docuseries celebrating Medal of Honor recipients.

The series highlights the lives and experiences of eight men who earned the honor since World War II. So naturally, several current and former service members were asked to offer their expertise behind the scenes and on camera.

Humvees & Script Help & Actors, Oh My!

"[The DOD] sent several active-duty soldiers to be background in an episode, but they also sent Humvees and other vehicles, which are valuable assets to have for authenticity," said Marine Corps veteran Mike Dowling, who now works in the entertainment industry and did a lot of advising on choreography, tactics and weapons for the show.

Many of those soldiers were from the New York Army National Guard. One of the show's highlighted recipients, Army Master Sgt. Vito Bertoldo, was a member of the 42nd Infantry Division during World War II, which is now part of the NYARNG. So, it made sense for them to be part of it.

A camera operator films a slate at the start of a scene with a Humvee.

For an episode on Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Richard Etchberger, the Air Force reviewed the script, offered historical Vietnam footage to filmmakers and had historians consult on the reenactment scenes.

The other recipients highlighted are World War II soldiers Army Sgt. Sylvester Antolak and Army Sgt. Edward Carter, Korean War troops Army Cpl. Hiroshi Miyamura and Marine Corps Cpl. Joseph Vittori, and more recent recipients Army Spc. Ty Carter and Army Staff Sgt. Clint Romesha, who fought in Afghanistan.

Dowling also connected the production to resources in the veteran community, including getting veterans jobs as actors, stuntmen, editors and production assistants. The DOD helped him verify the vets who applied for positions.

"This production was extremely supportive of getting veterans hired when possible," he said.

Reconnecting Long-Lost Vets

A lot of research went into finding the recipients' brothers in arms to tell their stories on camera — a tough prospect when decades have passed for many of them. But Dowling said their efforts actually helped put the Congressional Medal of Honor Society back in touch with a few of the recipients' families who it had lost touch with over the years.

One of the best connections they made was this:

"We couldn't find anybody to tell Joe Vittori's story," Dowling said.

But he had learned of a man named Lyle Conaway, who fought side by side with Vittori in battle. And Dowling couldn't find any obituaries for Conaway.

"So I started calling American Legions in his hometown and ... we found him. He's alive," Dowling said. "He doesn't even have a phone. I had the commander of the legion drive to his house and call me from his cellphone to put me on the phone with him. I had to speak to him through his girlfriend because he can't really hear all that well. But once he realized what we were calling for, he said, 'Oh my God, I have to tell Joe's story. I needed to do this.'"

But wait: It gets better!

Conaway helped put them in touch with several other living Marines who witnessed Vittori's actions. One of them was Tom Zayas, who producers brought in for an interview with Conaway.

"They had not seen each other since the night of the battle. Lyle had been medically evacuated that night," Dowling said. "They would keep in touch, but they'd never seen each other. So, we reunited them from the battle on camera for the series about Joe's story."

Pretty cool, huh?

This was Netflix's first partnership with the DOD. We're glad they decided to aim high for it!

You can find the docuseries, aptly titled Medal of Honor, currently streaming on Netflix.

(This article was originally published on Nov. 13, 2018.)

<https://www.defense.gov/News/Feature-Stories/Story/Article/1688861/bringing-medal-of-honor-heroics-to-life/>

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## **Marcellus National Guard member promoted**

**Eagle News Online, March 14, 2025 :  
Mar 21, 2025**

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

Jackson Masetta from Marcellus, and assigned to the Company C, NY Recruiting & Retention Battalion, received a promotion February 26, 2025 to the rank of private.

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.

Army National Guard Citizen Soldiers who serve our state and nation are eligible for monthly pay, educational benefits (from the state and federal government), travel across the globe, technical and leadership training, health and dental insurance and contributions towards retirement programs similar to a 401(k).

For more information about the New York Army National Guard, visit [www.dmna.ny.gov](http://www.dmna.ny.gov) or [www.1800goguard.com](http://www.1800goguard.com)

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, 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.

<https://eaglenewsonline.com/new/2025/03/14/marcellus-national-guard-member-promoted-2/>

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## **The ghosts of the Iraq War still haunt me, and our foreign policy**

**Responsible Statecraft, March 20, 2025 :  
Mar 21, 2025**

*As a young National Guardsman I reported for duty on March 21, 2003. Why are there still troops there today?*

On St. Patrick's Day, March 17, 2003, President Bush issued his final ultimatum to Saddam Hussein. Two nights later, my Iraq War started inauspiciously. I was a college student tending bar in New York City. Someone pointed to the television behind me and said: "It's begun. They're bombing Baghdad!" In Iraq it was already early morning of March 20.

I arrived home a few hours later to find the half-expected voice message on my answering machine: "You are ordered to report to the armory tomorrow morning no later than 0800, with all your gear."

At the time, I served in an infantry unit of the New York Army National Guard. By mid-day, our gear loaded, most of my company headed up the Hudson River to New York's military training site, Camp Smith. The state had activated us for a homeland security mission. As the

war began, one of the biggest unknowns was whether Saddam had the resources and connections to conduct terrorist strikes in the U.S. Less than two years after September 11, 2001, many feared New York City could be struck again.

Our unit spent about a week training for various scenarios that could take place on New York City's transit system. By night we watched news reports and evaluated our military's progress in Iraq. Before April, we were executing a mission guarding the subways alongside the New York City Police Department. I led a four-man team securing the platform under City Hall.

By the time President Bush staged his "Mission Accomplishment" moment on May 1, I was back in class, studying international relations. I expected to graduate the following January. But the mission wasn't quite accomplished.

In August, as I prepared to begin my final semester, my unit received a verbal warning order that we would be mobilizing to deploy to Iraq. Graduation was delayed. In October I found myself at Fort Drum, New York, training for Iraq.

It wasn't until early March that our battalion task force, including my company, was deployed into Iraq itself. On the evening of March 17, 2004, just a few days short of the war's first anniversary, I came under and returned fire, alongside a few dozen of my battle buddies.

At the end of October, while driving the lead HMMV of a patrol returning to base, I received a frantic call from our Battalion Commander, advising of enemy contact and calling for reinforcement and casualty evacuation. In the patrol's lead vehicle, I didn't wait for orders, I simply turned around and headed toward the fight.

A complex attack by insurgents with small arms and an IED killed Segun Akintade. We got there too late. It was October 28. Segun had immigrated to New York from Nigeria a few years earlier. Nicknamed Obi Wan, he was a giant man with a larger laugh. He worked at Bear Stearns to afford school and, like me, he studied at the City University of New York. He served in my fire team during that mission securing the subway at the beginning of the war.

His death was not the first for our battalion. Officially, it was the last, but tragedy struck again a month later and a few dozen kilometers away. Several soldiers we left behind in 2003 had been reassigned to another New York unit and then mobilized for the next cycle of deployments. In late November, another IED killed two more of my friends, both New York firefighters. Men we had trained with and knew well had their lives taken too soon. Several others suffered devastating wounds but survived.

All of this happened more than two decades ago. In the intervening years, more soldiers from that deployment died in Iraq and Afghanistan. Several took their own lives back at home.

In 2010, President Obama "brought all military combat personnel" home from Iraq. There are multiple problems with that statement, but the most obvious is: The enemy gets a vote as we say. If you come under fire while serving in the military, you're a combatant (rare exceptions like chaplains prove the rule).

On March 20, 2025, we still have American soldiers in Iraq. There are roughly 2,500 U.S. troops serving overtly in a “train and advise” mission. These American service members, like their current counterparts in Syria and the greater Middle East, are at risk. The attack on Tower 22 in Jordan last year, which killed three young American reservists, demonstrates the vulnerability of thinly stretched U.S. forces, deployed with no clearly elaborated national interest to the United States. This vulnerability will sooner or later be exploited again to the detriment of our troops.

In the 22 years since I received the news that I would be mobilized to support the war in Iraq, over 4,000 American troops have fought and died there. Some of these deaths were deeply personal. The costs to families have been tragic. With the Islamic State’s caliphate long-since defeated, the so-called logic for U.S. forces to be in Iraq is gone.

After 22 years, it’s time to put an end to our “boots on the ground” mission in Iraq, draw down our presence in the Middle East, and only risk the lives of American military men and women when there is an undeniable national interest

<https://responsiblestatecraft.org/iraq-war-anniversary/>

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## **Subway Mission**

### **U.S. Threatens to Cut Off M.T.A. Funds Over Subway Safety**

New York Times, March 19, 2025 :

#### ***U.S. Threatens to Cut Off M.T.A. Funds Over Subway Safety***

The Trump administration threatened on Tuesday to withhold federal funding from New York’s mass transit network if the Metropolitan Transportation Authority did not respond to a series of demands about efforts to prevent crime on the city’s subway and buses.

Sean Duffy, the transportation secretary, said in a letter that the M.T.A. must provide a long list of details about crime in New York City’s transit system, including expenditures on programs to combat it, or face the prospect of losing an untold sum of federal funding.

The threat comes amid a continuing battle between the Trump administration and the state-run transit agency over the congestion-pricing toll program that began operating in Manhattan in January. Mr. Trump has moved to kill the program and has given the authority until Friday to abandon it. Gov. Kathy Hochul and M.T.A. leaders have sued to keep it intact.



Mr. Duffy's letter did not mention congestion pricing, but transit experts and legal observers have said that the federal government might threaten to withdraw funding from other projects to gain leverage in its opposition to the toll.

The M.T.A. relies on billions of dollars a year from the federal government to improve service and is seeking \$14 billion from Washington in its next five-year capital budget.

But it was unclear what the federal agency was aiming to accomplish. Crime in the subway has been trending down in New York City, and much of the data related to its prevention is publicly available.

The letter, addressed to Janno Lieber, the head of the M.T.A., demands that the transit authority share the number of assaults on transit workers in the last two years; statistics on fare evasion; attacks on passengers, including the number who were pushed onto train tracks; and evidence of its efforts to prevent these crimes, among other requests. The federal agency set a deadline of March 31.

"People traveling on the N.Y.C.T. system to reach their jobs, education, health care and other critical services need to feel secure and travel in a safe environment free of crime," Mr. Duffy wrote, referring to the division of the M.T.A. that operates the subway and buses.

He added, "I appreciate your prompt attention to this matter to avoid further consequences, up to and including redirecting or withholding funding."

In a statement, John J. McCarthy, the chief of policy and external relations at the M.T.A., said the agency was "happy to discuss" its continuing efforts to reduce crime in the transit system. He noted that the authority was already making progress, with subway crime down 40 percent so far this year, compared with the same period in 2020, shortly before the pandemic. Fare evasion had declined by 25 percent in the second half of 2024, he said.

Just 4 percent of violent crime in the city occurs in the subway, but a few recent traumatic events have shaken riders.

In December, Debrina Kawam, a 57-year-old woman, died after she was set on fire as she slept on a train. Later that month, Joseph Lynskey was shoved in front of an oncoming train at the 18th Street station in Manhattan and survived. There were 10 murders in the subway in 2024, up from three in 2019.

And in 2023, for the first time in nearly two decades, felony assaults outnumbered robberies in the subway, raising concerns that the nature of violence underground was becoming more unpredictable.

The letter sent to the M.T.A. resembles one that the Trump administration sent on March 6 to the head of the transit authority in Washington, D.C., which called for a similar crackdown on crime and fare evasion.

In both cases, Mr. Duffy reminded the authorities that their federal resources could and should be used for crime prevention. Neither letter referred to the use of federal funding to pay for infrastructure projects.

The Trump administration has also wielded the threat of withdrawing federal funds against Columbia University. Earlier this month, it canceled \$400 million in federal grants and contracts to Columbia, saying it was the “first round of action” in response to what it called the university’s failure to protect Jewish students from antisemitism.

Ms. Hochul has said she is making subway safety a priority. Last year, she ordered 1,000 members of the National Guard into the subway. About 1,250 Guard members, M.T.A. officers and state police officers now patrol the system, according to the governor’s office.

That doesn’t include several hundred New York City police officers who have been added to subway patrol assignments, allowing the department to place two officers on every overnight train, Police Commissioner Jessica Tisch said at a recent City Council hearing.

In a statement, the governor’s office cited its recent deployment of uniformed officers on the subway and said it was open to “partnering with the federal government on ways to fund New York’s priorities.”

But critics of the city’s and state’s approaches have pointed to the limits of flooding the system with officers, when there is also a need for more social service outreach. Nearly two-thirds of people with repeated arrests in the subway had a history of homelessness or mental illness between 2022 and 2023, according to John Hall, a retired police official and an adviser to Vital City, an urban policy think tank.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/18/nyregion/trump-mta-funding.html>

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## **US threatens to withhold transit funds over New York subway crime**

**Reuters, March 18, 2025 :**

- MTA told to provide documents showing its plan to "ensure effective security"
- Letter comes same day that MTA says it will not halt congestion pricing
- MTA says it has sharply reduced crime and fare evasion

March 18 (Reuters) - U.S. Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy on Tuesday threatened to withhold federal transit funds, opens new tab from New York's Metropolitan Transportation Authority over crime and safety on the New York City subway system and other issues.

The MTA is the state agency that operates the city's subway and buses, as well as commuter rail lines that serve nearby suburbs.

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Duffy said the MTA "must ensure a safe and clean environment, reduce crime and fare evasion, and maintain a safe operating system." He wants the MTA to provide documents by March 31 on its plan to "ensure effective security for passengers and workers." He cited questions about assaults, including passengers who have been pushed in front of trains.

The letter came the same day that MTA CEO Janno Lieber said the agency did not intend to honor a demand from the U.S. Transportation Department that it halt Manhattan's congestion pricing program by Friday. "Nothing is going to change. We are very confident there won't be a rollback of congestion pricing," Lieber said.

Congestion pricing, which was introduced in January, charges a toll in Manhattan on vehicles driving south of 60th Street. The program is designed to cut down traffic in Manhattan and speed the flow of vehicles and raise revenue to fund mass transit capital improvements, mainly for the subway but also for commuter rail lines.

The MTA and a New York bridge authority in February filed a lawsuit in federal court in Manhattan seeking to block the order to halt congestion pricing.

"The trend of violent crime, homelessness, and other threats to public safety on one of our nation's most prominent metro systems is unacceptable," Duffy said. He said he also wanted answers on how the MTA would reduce injuries from suicide events and "subway surfing," the illegal daredevil practice of riding atop moving subway cars.

The MTA in response said it has sharply reduced crime and fare evasion with the help of the New York City Police Department. "Crime is down 40% compared to the same period in 2020 right before the pandemic, and so far in 2025 there are fewer daily major crimes in transit than any non-pandemic year ever," the MTA said.

Last year, New York Governor Kathy Hochul directed the deployment of another 250 members of the New York National Guard to assist with transit security and said the MTA had installed 15,396 security cameras that are in all subway cars.

The MTA had more than 1 billion subway rides last year, a big rebound from pandemic lows but still below pre-pandemic levels.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-threatens-withhold-transit-funds-over-new-york-subway-incidents-2025-03-18/>

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