



Transcript

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NATIONAL GUARD ON-THE-RECORD ZOOM/TELEPHONIC MEDIA ROUNDTABLE

Jan 3, 2022

| TOPIC | SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS |
|--|---|
| Media Roundtable – National Guard COVID-19 Response Efforts | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Army Gen. Daniel Hokanson, chief of the National Guard Bureau▪ Maj. Gen. John C. Harris Jr., the Ohio National Guard's Adjutant General▪ Army Brig. Gen. Isabel Rivera Smith, the New York National Guard's Director of Joint Staff▪ Air Force Col Michael Bruno, Chief of the Joint Staff, Joint Force Headquarters, Colorado National Guard▪ Army Colonel Will DiProfio, Director of Joint Plans, Operations and Military Support, Colorado National Guard.▪ Air Force Master Sgt. Robert Stephens, NCO in-charge at the testing site at the Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center |

Background:

The National Guard has been at the forefront of the COVID-19 Pandemic response across the nation, providing support to state and local authorities. Currently more than 15,200 National Guard soldiers and airmen are activated for COVID-19 response operations in 49 states and territories. This includes more than 6,000 Guard men and women providing direct support to medical facilities.

Dialogue:

[Name]

[QUESTION/RESPONSE]

Nahaku McFadden

[00:04:14]

Good afternoon, thank you for joining us. My name is Nahaku McFadden, and I'm from the National



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Guard Bureau Public Affairs Office, and I'm going to be moderating today's media roundtable on the state National Guard support for our National Guard COVID 19 response efforts. This is scheduled for approximately 45minutes and is on the record before we begin. I asked all of you to stay muted until I call on you for your questions. When asking a questions, please identify yourself, your outlet and limit to one question and a follow up. If we have time, we'll go around the room again. Today we have Army Gen. Daniel Hokanson, chief of the National Guard Bureau. Army Major General John Harris Jr., Adjutant General, Ohio National Guard. We also have Army Brigadier General Isabel Rivera, Smith, Director of Joint Staff New York National Guard and Air Force Colonel Michael Bruno, chief of Staff with the Joint Staff of the headquarters at Colorado National Guard, and Army Colonel Will DiProfilo, Director of Joint Plans, Operations and Military Support, Colorado National Guard. And we also have Air Force Master Sergeant Robert Stephens of the Ohio National Guard, and he's then on commissioned officer in charge of the testing site at the Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center. Each representative will bring provide brief on the record comments in the media. We also have in the advisory we sent out their bios, but we're also going to drop them into the chat so that if you don't have that, you can pull that down from there. Following their comments, we're going to take your questions. With that, I'll turn it over to General Hokanson for his comments, sir. Over to you.

Gen. Daniel Hokanson, chief of the National Guard Bureau

[00:06:07]



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Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, and I appreciate the opportunity to discuss how our National Guard soldiers and airmen are continuing to support their communities in the fight against COVID19 as we speak, more than fifteen thousand two hundred guard members from 49 states and territories are contributing to the governor's efforts to fight the COVID 19 virus. In 2021, we witnessed our soldiers and airmen get over ten point two million days responding to COVID 19, civil disturbances, hurricanes, tornadoes and wildfires, as well as all of our overseas deployments. I'm especially proud to report the National Guard met every single request for assistance, both at home and overseas, or facing uncertain and often austere conditions to help our communities and our international partners. From the beginning of the pandemic, National Guard men and women in each of the 50 states, 3 territories and D.C. have been on the front lines, testing and screening at community members, running warehouses and getting personal protective equipment where it needed to be. National Guard members also administered over 14 million vaccinations to their neighbors. It's important to note all of these successful homeland response missions were made possible because of the funding, manning, training and equipping we receive as a combat reserve. The Army of the Air Force without question, when disaster strike at home. The Army National Guard has 73 percent who have received at least one dose of the vaccine and 92percent of the Air National Guard have received at least one dose of the vaccine. These percentages continue to increase every single day. Today, to tell the specific COVID response story, I've asked four of our state's senior leaders and one of our testing site, noncommissioned officers to



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offer their boots on the ground perspective of the work they're doing. From Ohio, their Adjutant General, John Harris Jr. has nearly 2500 guardsmen and women mobilized in support of COVID 19 operations. That's the highest number of guard members supporting the COVID mission in all of our states and territories. Joining General Harris as Master Sergeant Robert Stephens is our lead at the Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center testing site. From New York, we have the New York director of the Joint Staff, Brigadier General Isabelle Rivera Smith. She's here to share with you what nearly 1600 new National Guard soldiers and airmen are doing to support COVID 19 operations there. And we're pleased Colonel Mike Bruno, Colorado's chief of the Joint Staff. And Colonel Will DiProffio, their director of joint plans, operations and military support, are able to join us. Our members have trained what are called qualified certified medical assistance personnel who are administering medication to patients at long term care facilities. We're the only state with guard members currently performing this important function. As you probably know, for three hundred and eighty five years, guard men or women have defended our country and protected our communities across the 50 states, three territories in D.C. and around the globe. Today we get to talk about just one of the many missions we do in our four hundred and forty five thousand Guardsmen are able to do to keep our promise to America of being always ready, always there. With that, I'd like to hand it over to Major General John Harris from the Ohio National Guard.

Army Maj. Gen. John C. Harris Jr., the Ohio National Guard's Adjutant General

[00:09:46]



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Thank you, General Hokanson and sir, so thank you to your entire staff. I can't emphasize the importance of the work that's been done being done by the National Guard Bureau to make sure that the states are properly administered, equipped, organized and our personnel are properly supported to respond to these missions. It all came together in December when Governor DeWine called us and activated the Ohio National Guard to support the hospitals. As you mentioned, almost twenty five hundred Ohio National Guard members are currently deployed in support of this. Almost twenty three hundred of those are directly in support of our hospitals right now. That's 60 different locations. Forty eight of those are hospitals, 12 of those are testing sites, and the primary function is to ensure that we can help the hospitals meet their capacity as they're being overrun by the perfect storm, the perfect storm being the Delta variant, OMICRON variant in the society at the same time, as well as staffing challenges as they deal with overly stressed, overly taxed staff, as well as their own COVID positives within the hospital. So that strain as a result primarily of this huge Omicron surge, has caused them to have concerns about their ability to deliver the standards of care that are required to meet their patients needs. So we're expanding the capacity in those hospitals by adding medical teams, non-medical teams and running testing sites. Our medical teams are going in and working side by side with the clinical staff to as they deal with the surge primarily in their emergency departments, as they have to open additional COVID beds and their ICU and other departments within the hospital. Those are our nurses, our providers and our medic. 68 whiskeys in our four Novembers in the in the Air



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National Guard. Our non-clinical people are doing a variety of missions inside the hospitals also. Those missions range from environmental services, helping turn rooms and clean surfaces. They are helping with patient transport inside the hospitals, moving just moving patients from A to B to take that load off the clinical staff. They're doing general administrative tasks. And they've discovered another a number of other tasks that they can help that that can help the hospital expand their capacity, for example, if a person may be a harm to themselves, somebody in that hospital is required to have eyes on that patient twenty four hours, seven days a week. So if a National Guardsman can fulfill that role to free that provider up, to go and do other things clinical tasks, it certainly helps extend the capacity of the hospital to meet this the staffing crisis that they have. And also, we continue to seek other ways to help if we can help and the pharmacy, moving, packaging around the hospital, helping stock shelves. We find our guardsmen doing all those things. I have to emphasize that the testing is probably one of the greatest ways that we've been able to help the hospitals extend their capacity. The emergency departments are overwhelmed with people who are coming and looking for COVID testing. They need that to return to work. They may need it to take a trip to visit family, or they may have symptoms and want to have a test for that, and they just can't get their hands on the test kits right now. So those people are reporting to the emergency department. We're establishing these off site near the hospital testing site so that so that those people can come through and get that testing done on those sites, that some of those are running over a thousand people a day through those testing sites. That's a thousand people that are not going to the



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emergency department to get those tests, thereby relieving that strain on the emergency departments. I also have to emphasize that that the way the National Guard is figured, as I mentioned, organize has made it almost perfect for this type of response. The way the guard is organized in small teams now with leaders organic leadership, we can take intermediate headquarters and overlay those over top of our medical regions and establish those relationships, but also have regional command and control. The way we've organized with Joint Task Force has made it perfect structure to get us deployed quickly and we can very agile move these small teams from hospital, location as we follow the demands of the hospitals, as well as tracking as this disease changes, we had Cleveland, which was probably the second hot spot in the nation for a while. But as Cleveland, we see the numbers fortunately start to decline in Cleveland. We can very quickly lift and shift those teams to other places around the state where we may see surges and the virus still. So we've been able to move quickly. We've been able to be agile. But most importantly, it's important that the relationships we've had with our Department of Health and our hospital association has helped us to ensure that we have the right troops in the right places at the right time to meet the need.

Nahaku McFadden

[00:14:46]

Thank you, sir. Brigadier General Smith.

Army Brig. Gen. Isabel Rivera Smith, the New York National Guard's Director of Joint Staff

[00:14:50]



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Good afternoon. I'm Brigadier General Isabel Smith, director of the Joint Staff for the New York National Guard. On behalf of the Governor Kathy Hochul, I'm pleased to provide the short update on the National Guard response to the COVID pandemic here in New York. Since March 8th of 2020, nearly two years ago, the New York National Guard or State Defense Force and our state's defense forces have done many missions that are new and innovative in our support to New York's COVID response efforts across the state. Last month, Governor Hochul asked if we could train up to 400 members of our National Guard as New York's Certified Emergency Medical Technicians, with soldiers and airmen who otherwise have no medical training in their career field, just like Ohio. We to have shortages in the hospital, so that is why we were asked to do this mission at our height. We were at thirty six hundred service members on duty, and we currently almost have six hundred on duty today. Our first class for the EMT started on the 5th of January of this year and we expect them to be certified and available for new missions as early as February of this year. We have an additional nine classes planned across the state starting this month and into February. The training is provided by the New York State Department of Health and one certified. The certification is good for three years, working closely with the governor's office and the New York State Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services. We have provided more than 1.4 million working days supporting COVID mitigation missions so far across the state, including many missions that we never have expected, including close call centers, cell operations to assist the Department of Health with contact tracing, alternate care facility set up and operation cleaning



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public buildings transporting COVID supplies and protective equipment across the state. Food packaging, food packaging and distribution of fifty four million meals to communities in need. Assembly of six test kits across the state. Medical Examiner's support for New York City and Westchester counties. Warehouse management for medical supplies. Health data collection, with 3 million arriving travelers at 12 airports across New York state. Mass vaccination sites for more than four million shots, including our own medics providing vaccinations. Nursing home support currently at 12 sites. And distribution of rapid home COVID tests across the state to include many of the school districts. Thank you for your time today, and if you have any questions, I am available to answer that.

Nahaku McFadden

[00:17:36]

Thank you, ma'am. And Colonel Bruno, would you please provide some comments?

Air Force Col Michael Bruno, Chief of the Joint Staff, Joint Force Headquarters, Colorado National Guard

[00:17:41]

Absolutely. Thank you. Nahaku, good morning from Colorado. I am Colonel Mike Bruno, the chief of Joint Staff for the Colorado National Guard. Joining me today is Colonel Will DiProfio our director of Joint Plans, Operations and military support on behalf of Governor Jared Polis and Brigadier General Laura Clellan, the Adjutant General. We are pleased to provide this short update on the National Guard's response to the COVID



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pandemic here in Colorado. Today is operational period sixhundred and seventy two for the our COVID response for March of 2020 until today, we've had numerous task forces in the field supporting the state's COVID response mission. These task forces have provided testing in multiple counties across the state, including in long term care facilities. They have provided operations, planning and logistics support to small county emergency operation centers, and they were key in providing logistics support to Gov. policies, school mask and test kit initiative. We were also the lead agency for planning for the state of Colorado for vaccine. Most recently, we added over 200 servicemembers supporting testing at thirty three different locations across the state in support of countering the Omicron surge. Today, I want to focus on task force supporting long term care facilities. The Colorado National Guard began supporting long term care facilities in November of 2020 with a brief break in the summer of 2021, as the COVID cases subsided with the most recent surge. Our service members went back to work in these facilities. Currently, the task force has 20 army and nine Air Force Service members supporting eight facilities across the state. The task force has partnered with the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment to provide support to these facilities, hit hard by COVID related critical staffing shortages. These non-medical National Guard members receive training to become qualified medication administration personnel, also known as Q Map and temporary nurse's aides. The online training to become a Q map is approximately 16hours, and the temporary nurse's aide training is an additional 16 hours. These servicemembers typically work 12 hour shifts, administering medication as directed by



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a physician's written order. They assist patients with daily life activities and assist nursing- staff with basic patient care tasks. In addition, this mission is continuously changing locations and facilities, sometimes on short notice. Since October of twenty twenty one, we have supported 46 separate facilities. This operation supports Colorado's most vulnerable population 24-7. Thank you for letting me join you today. Are there any questions?

Nahaku McFadden

[00:20:30]

Thank you so much, sir. Okay, so we're going to start off with Lolita Baldor Associated Press.

Reporter 1

[00:20:37]

Thank you very much. I have a question for General Hokanson and then a question more broadly for the state of the state military leaders. Gen. Hokanson, can you tell me, are you happy or are you frustrated with the pace of vaccinations for the army guard, even though their deadline isn't until June? Because it is so low right now? And then for the state, folks. Can you tell me whether you are requiring vaccines for your guard members who are actively interacting with patients and with people at testing facilities? And are you having any staffing shortages due to your own guards, guard members being ill?

Nahaku McFadden

[00:21:35]



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I apologize, but General Hokanson had a previous engagement and had to drop off. We will follow up and get you the answers that you just asked of General Hokanson. But if we would like to start with General Harris, if for the second aspect of her question about National Guardsmen and their own health and how they're responding in your state?

Army Maj. Gen. John C. Harris Jr., the Ohio National Guard's Adjutant General

[00:21:58]

Yes. Well, in answer to the question about the mission, we are not employing unvaccinated people to be in contact with patients, even at our testing centers, those people who will be collecting samples, every one of them is vaccinated. We do have some partially vaccinated people on the mission and they are doing administrative tasks, traffic control those sorts of things, but they're not in direct contact with patients.

Nahaku McFadden

[00:22:26]

Thank you, sir. Master Sergeant Stephens, what are you seeing there inside of the hospital? You're on the ground? Is there anything that you can share and provide a little bit more detail?

Master Sergeant Robert Stephens

[00:22:38]

Thanks for asking me here. I'm actually a couple of miles away from the hospital. A business businesses let us set up in a parking garage with this test site. Since I opened up on January 3rd here at this site with LSU, we started out testing two hundred and ninety one people. And as of yesterday, we tested a



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thousand and eighty in eight hours. So the numbers are going up. The people testing is going up and it's all by appointment only at this certain facility so that many people with appointments. It's pretty serious.

Reporter 1

[00:23:20]

And you all addressed the question about whether you're seeing COVID infections affecting your own staff level.

Master Sergeant Robert Stephens

[00:23:31]

My staffing levels here at the facility, I have only maybe had one member actually come get covered, but it was from a contact over the weekend. It wasn't from anything here at the test site. We have not had any members contact COVID on site at all since I've been here.

Air Force Col Michael Bruno, Chief of the Joint Staff, Joint Force Headquarters, Colorado National Guard

[00:23:55]

Here in Colorado, in terms of COVID within the joint task force, we deal with it like any other organization. They have all the appropriate PPE, so we don't see very many. I would say that the COVID cases that we've seen within our task forces have not really affected currently affected our meaning. We're there to support the community and help them with their staffing shortages that they're dealing with the same types of problems.

Nahaku McFadden



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[00:24:26]

General Smith, is there anything from New York?

Army Brig. Gen. Isabel Rivera Smith, the New York National Guard's Director of Joint Staff

[00:24:28]

Yes. There is nobody on any of the missions that are not vaccinated. We have individuals that have their first shot, but mainly we have folks that are vaccinated and they specifically for the class said that the Department of Health is hosting for the EMT. It is a requirement that those individuals are fully vaccinated before they can be part of that or so. And those that maybe just have the one shot and or not booster they wear the proper PPE. But for the most part, we are pretty much all vaccinated for any type of missions across the state of New York.

Nahaku McFadden

[00:25:07]

Thank you very much. Continuing on, Courtney Kube from NBC News, Courtney, are you there?

Reporter 2

[00:25:16]

I'm here thanks, but I don't have any questions. Thanks.

Nahaku McFadden

[00:25:18]

Thank you so much. OK. Nancy Youssef from Wall Street Journal.

Reporter 3

[00:25:23]

Thank you so much. I also don't have a question.



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Nahaku McFadden

[00:25:26]

Well, thank you for being here. Do we have David Martin from CBS News? Nothing heard. He Drew Brooks. National Guard magazine.

Reporter 4

[00:25:45]

Yes, I was hoping someone could walk me through whatever sort of safety precautions are in place, both for guardsmen on the mission and as they come off mission and return to their families and civilian jobs. Also, I know the length of orders and whether or not Guardsmen qualified for health care was an issue early in the pandemic. I'm wondering if that is something that comes up now or are the Guardsmen currently working COVID 19 missions? Are they also receiving health care coverage during that time?

Nahaku McFadden

[00:26:18]

Let's start with Sergeant Stephens, if you could explain what's what is the process for members that are coming to duty every day? And then if General Harris, you would like to follow up with the secondary question.

Sergeant Stevens. Master Sergeant Robert Stephens

[00:26:33]

The safety protocols that we use here. Everybody where anyone in contact with a patient, they are wearing gowns and 95 masks, face shields, rubber gloves, two layers of rubber gloves, actually everybody else in the facility is wearing a mask. I am off and a little corner right here, so I'm able to



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do this call without a mask. But the safety protocols here are tremendous. Nobody's going to get infected from COVID within this facility where we're at.

Nahaku McFadden

[00:27:11]

Thank you for explaining that. General Harris, what about how National Guardsmen have insurance or not? Could you please explain what's happening in the states?

Army Maj. Gen. John C. Harris Jr., the Ohio National Guard's Adjutant General

[00:27:21]

The people on this mission are on five or two F orders or on a federal orders. So they're covered by TRICARE and we protect them as we would with that insurance coverage, as we would for our soldiers were deployed anywhere else globally there. They deserve that. But on the protection piece also, I'd like to mention that we go through and I think most of the states go through a pretty aggressive JRSOI - joint reception staging integration, all work movement process at the front side of this on boarding and as a part of that process, not only do we do the typical administrative things, but we make sure that those people we're putting in the hospital are trained for it. So if they require HIPA training so that we don't violate patients privacy rights, if they require just training on movement of patients, and the requirements are that unique hospital situation demands we put them through workplace violence training. We put them through an entire series of training before ever putting them in that situation to do the prevention on the front end. And also want to mention that when it comes to COVID and COVID infections, we know that people are going to get



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infected on this mission. Not all the infections are hospital acquired. These many of these people are working near their homes of record. They go back to their homes, they go to their communities, they go to the grocery store, they do all the other things that citizens do when they're not on duty. And so we for, well, expect COVID infections. But the important thing is what we do if the person wants to quarantine away from there or isolate away from their families as a result infection, we get the opportunity to do that if they have a high risk member in their home or whatever we're given the opportunity to isolate away from. From that, we ensure that we document that illness. So if somewhere down the line there are unforeseen situations or circumstances as a result, the elements that we haven't documented so. So yes, people get sick, they're going to get sick, but not all of its hospital or mission acquire. But we still give them the same protections we would as if it were.

Nahaku McFadden

[00:29:20]

Thank you, sir. General Smith, is there anything you would like to add for how New York is managing the processes for their National Guardsmen coming on and off of duty?

Army Brig. Gen. Isabel Rivera Smith, the New York National Guard's Director of Joint Staff

[00:29:33]

So I can say the same as General Harris. We need to have our JRSOI process here in New York, and we brief everybody on all the precautions that they have to take. Now, of course, everybody is vaccinated. That comes on the mission. And also, when they do come off the mission, they have 180



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days of TRICARE after they come off the mission that they'll still have. So the health care is still there even after they come off the mission. So they also do the post deployment health assessment that is part of the process for the back end for the JRSOI. So we do have all the help health protections in place that we would have for anybody else. So we're definitely covered down with that piece.

Nahaku McFadden

[00:30:21]

Thank you, ma'am. Moving on, Ellie Coffman from CNN.

Reporter 5

[00:30:26]

I am present. No question. Thank you.

Nahaku McFadden

[00:30:28]

Thank you so much for being here. OK, so how about Kristina Wong from Breitbart News? Nothing heard Corey Dickinson stars and stripes.

Reporter 6

[00:30:46]

I'm here, thanks. I'm just wondering, you know, you guys all obviously have other operations going on besides just the COVID focus that has, you know, this massive spike in cases impacted y'all's ability to respond to anything else you have going on or just, you know, your regular training.

Nahaku McFadden

[00:31:14]

Colonel DiProfio, would you like to begin?



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Army Colonel Will DiProffio

[00:31:20]

Sure. You know, it's like anything else, you know, like every organization in the country where we have safety protocols put in place that enable us to continue operations even within the pandemic. We've been in this thing for two years. So as folks are drilling down range or at home station, they're following all the same COVID protocols. So we're at this point not seeing as much of an impact to training or other operations that we did that we did before. So we're learning to live with the current situation and continuing the mission as best we can.

Colonel Di Proffio

[00:32:04]

If I can add to that. Corey, we recently, unfortunately, the citizens of Lewisville in Superior Colorado experienced one of the worst fires in the history of the state of Colorado now and within the timeframe after where we were requested for support from the governor, we had nearly 100 service members up there providing traffic control points and assisting local law enforcement with the recovery efforts did not impact our mission. We got them up there as quickly as we could. And just as always from all three states, our service members just knocked it out of the park and took care of their fellow citizens. So that would be my response, as it has not impacted directly our ability to do our other missions.

Nahaku McFadden

[00:32:50]

General Smith, would you like to add anything to that



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Army Brig. Gen. Isabel Rivera Smith, the New York National Guard's Director of Joint Staff

[00:32:55]

We too in New York, it has not impacted us in any way. I mean, we have a lot of training that we have to ramp on the army side, specifically individual soldiers up for deployments. We have several deployments that are coming up. We do have our winter storms. We have things that happened here in New York and we are not in any way impacted. We have a pretty robust soldiers and airmen that have volunteered for COVID. But any other mission that we may have, they are ready and able to move forward with those missions.

Nahaku McFadden

[00:33:31]

Do you also have a follow on question?

Reporter 6

[00:33:36]

No, I'm good, thank you.

Nahaku McFadden

[00:33:38]

Thank you, Corey. And next, Maria Triandos NBC. Or DanGallo, either of you here. Nothing heard. CBS News Eleanor Watson.

Reporter 7

[00:34:00]

I'm here, thank you. I'm just wondering if in the two years responding to COVID, there was ever a break or what the lowest amount of support got to before the surge.



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Nahaku McFadden

[00:34:12]

Thank you, General Harris. Would you like to begin?

Army Maj. Gen. John C. Harris Jr., the Ohio National Guard's Adjutant General

[00:34:17]

Yeah, I sure would. I wouldn't call it much of a break, but we were down to just by comparison. We're almost 2500 on orders today. We were down to about 180 eighty on orders at one point. So I wouldn't call it a break, but it waxes and wanes the number of people that we have on orders. And it's a reference to last question. I think it ties into this question also, you know, as we bring people on and off orders, what one of the great things about the partnerships that we have across the rest of the state is how we can meet or manage who we bring on to orders and at what time we bring. Here's an example we know right now that the crisis is in the hospital, so we avoid bringing on too many health care professionals that would degrade the capability of the hospitals. The crisis is in our correctional facilities. We can avoid. We might want to steer around bringing on the corrections officers because keep in mind, the National Guard is a reflection of our community, so the people that we mobilize are coming from the community. So the question really isn't are we out of capability? Because I get the sense that that's what people get concerned about is their National Guard out of capability. It would be a very, very rare instance that any state's National Guard would literally run out of capability. This COVID puts a unique challenge on us because states are have difficulty mutually supporting each other, as we would with any other kind of crisis. But it's rare day that a National Guard state would



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just completely run out of people running a capability that challenges how much stress do we put on other sectors as we continue to mobilize larger and larger numbers of people? Do we have to get after those first responders or can we leave them at work? Those are the sorts of things that we ask ourselves as we mobilize additional people following that the surges and the declines in the disease.

Nahaku McFadden

[00:36:05]

Thank you, sir. General Smith, do you have anything to add?

Army Brig. Gen. Isabel Rivera Smith, the New York National Guard's Director of Joint Staff

[00:36:08]

Yes. So for New York, we have been up and down as well, but I would say at our lowest point, we were just under a thousand service members on duty. And for example, this EMT training that we're currently conducting in partnership with the Department of Health. These are all volunteers of those that are not in the medical lane that wish to volunteer for this cause. They would get a three year certification, and many are very excited. Our adjutant general went to visit them yesterday and they're very excited about this course because it will give them an additional skill set to be able to use outside of the National Guard if they so choose to.

Nahaku McFadden

[00:36:50]

Thank you, ma'am. Continuing on, Gina, come out from Army magazine.



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Reporter 8

[00:36:58]

I'm Gina Cavallaro with Army magazine. So we're pretty close to wrapping up two years of this pandemic, and I know personally I'm a little burned out about it. How are you guys keeping tabs on, you know, this is a reflection of the community, as you said. So you know how it has the motor continuing to run morale wise and let's get out there and do this wise. How are you all dealing with that, especially in New York, where you have been at the epicenter of what they've called the two big surges in this pandemic? Thank you.

Nahaku McFadden

[00:37:37]

Let's start with Sergeant Stevens, because he's on the ground. What is it like for those who are working with you on the missions right there? How good is the field sergeant?

Master Sergeant Robert Stephens

[00:37:51]

We were coming in and just doing it on a daily basis. Day by day, I check on everybody. The younger guys make sure they're doing OK. There's anything I can do to help them. I watch out for everybody. There's 20 of us here. I look out for everybody as best I can. Make sure mentally they're doing fine. Physically, they're doing fine. All in all, everybody's in pretty good morale here. For what we're doing.

Nahaku McFadden

[00:38:23]

Thank you, General Smith.



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Army Brig. Gen. Isabel Rivera Smith, the New York National Guard's Director of Joint Staff

[00:38:25]

Yes. So I will tell you that since March of 2020, we have had a significant increase in our retention rate on both the army and the air side, and we believe that it is because of the impact that we have made our service members have made during this Covid pandemic. So I think that that says something for our service members, for their dedication. A lot of them that I've been out there to talk to have said, Listen, we join the National Guard to serve our community. So it really especially the younger ones where it's a little bit where they may as older folks might think that they're not, they don't care or but they absolutely positively do. And we see that every day when we go out there, we have a lot of our senior leaders that go out there and talk to each of our servicemembers. And they have definitely made a great impact and we certainly are appreciative of that. And with the retention rate that the way that it's going, we're really proud of all that we have to offer here in New York.

Nahaku McFadden

[00:39:33]

Thank you, ma'am. General Harris, are you finding the same thing?

Army Maj. Gen. John C. Harris Jr., the Ohio National Guard's Adjutant General

[00:39:37]

I am, and I think there are two things that have helped us sustain through for this last 2 years. And one of those is purpose. Those are our service members who are out there. It's very clear what you're doing and why you're doing it. There is no doubt that the community is appreciative because



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they're constantly bombarded with that appreciation from not only the people that are serving, whether it's coming through for a sampling site or the patients in the hospitals, but also the people that they're coming to help the morale in the hospitals. Here in Ohio, just seeing that uniform come through the hallways has increased pretty significantly. They'll tell you that they just know that helps on the way because we've been under so much strain for so much for so long. And those intrinsic benefits, I think, are fantastic for our service members. And the second is team. You know, we deploy and teams, whether that's a five person team or a 10 person team and a society in this kind of disconnected, I think our people appreciate having that environment to go to work in every day. And that team is all about trust, it's all about cohesion, all those things that we appreciate so much in the military. And I will add one other factor from the strategic- level, ensuring that we've got the chaplains out there and our behavioral science officers that are always sensing the force. And if we have if we have areas of concern where we might have burnout or we might have mental health issues for some of the folks working in the hospital, for example, that are in these stressful environments, we want to know that we have a responsibility to see those indicators, those warnings and ensure that we have help for those people who need it. I think that's been an important part of building that trust and ensuring that the people know that we have their backs.

Nahaku McFadden

[00:41:21]

Thank you, sir. Gina, do you have a follow on?



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[00:41:26]

No, I'm all set. Thanks, everybody.

Army Brig. Gen. Isabel Rivera Smith, the New York National Guard's Director of Joint Staff

[00:41:28]

I do have one more thing. This is General Smith, so I will piggyback on General Harris's about the chaplains in the behavior, how we in New York have a decompression workshop that we do here. I'm not certain if the term is workshop. But when a soldier comes off mission, that is a difficult mission, for example, in nursing homes and hospitals where they may see people who passed away or may see some things that other soldiers might not see. We do offer a decompression and we have behavioral health specialists. We have chaplains, and it gives them the opportunity to be expressive and talk about their experiences. And if they need follow on assistance, we offer that to them and make sure that they're connected with the right individuals utilizing their health care benefits with TRICARE.

Nahaku McFadden

[00:42:18]

Thank you, ma'am. Moving on, Rachel Nostrand from ArmyTimes.

Reporter 9

[00:42:24]

Hi, yes, thank you. So my question is directly for General Smith, but really for everyone after she responds. So you mentioned earlier that you have guards people that are not fully vaccinated. They've had at least one shot, but they're not fully



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vaccinated. So do those guardsmen still work in COVID response missions? And if so, in what capacity are they interacting with other people? And that question than I would like answered by everyone else as well. Thank you.

Army Brig. Gen. Isabel Rivera Smith, the New York National Guard's Director of Joint Staff

[00:42:58]

So, Rachel, so I will tell you that those that are not fully vaccinated are not on the COVID mission, I apologize if I said that and gave you the impression of that. We are talking just National Guard New York National Guard. We have some individuals that only have one of the vaccinations, but they are not on the mission right now. On the airside, we are at about ninety nine percent and on the army side we are at about eighty three percent right now and we have up until the 30th of June on the army side to be able to get those vaccinations. But no, we do not have anybody that is on mission, specifically anybody working in direct contact with anybody in hospitals or in nursing homes that only have one of the shots.

Nahaku McFadden

[00:43:45]

General Harris, would you like that?

Army Maj. Gen. John C. Harris Jr., the Ohio National Guard's Adjutant General

[00:43:48]

We do we have we have service members with one shot partially vaccinated on the COVID mission, not in direct contact with patients or with the public. They may be doing traffic control or some other administrative task, but we don't have them on the forward facing side of the response. The patient



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public facing side of the response and in the hospitals or the places where these people are working. Keep in mind that those facilities have people on their own staffs that are completely unvaccinated, so they have protocols in place. And when we employ people into these facilities, they're following the hospital's protocols. A protocol Department of Health take the lead and we have complete confidence that the public is completely protected and our service members are completely protected as results of the protocols that are in place and those hospitals that are more extreme for their completely unvaccinated staff.

Nahaku McFadden

[00:44:40]

Thank you, sir. Col DiProfio?

Army Colonel Will DiProfio

[00:44:45]

Yes, so it's a requirement to join the joint task force here in Colorado that the service members be completely vaccinated in order to protect the public, ourselves and our families. And additionally, a caveat to General Harris's comments. We follow all of the rules and regulations provided to us by public health and the long term care facilities that we that we go into, and we're confident that folks are protected.

Nahaku McFadden

[00:45:12]

Thank you, Rachel, do you have a follow up?

Reporter 9

[00:45:15]

No, thank you.



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Nahaku McFadden

[00:45:17]

Excellent. Spectrum news Austin Landis, are you on the line, Austin? We have a few that are on the line that have numbers. Is there somebody who would like to ask a question that you may not have asked? I might not have the information at this time. You can just open up and ask. Hey, nothing heard is anyone else has or excuse me, I think I missed Carrie Williams from Reserve and National Guard magazine, Carrie.

Reporter 10

[00:45:57]

I don't have any questions. Thank you.

Nahaku McFadden

[00:45:59]

Thank you. OK. Unless anyone else has. I'm going to open it one more time for questions. Just unmute yourself. Is there anyone else that has a second third question? We're following? Nothing heard. Well, this concludes our media roundtable on the National Guard's support to covert operations across the nation. We appreciate each of your time for being here, especially those of our panel. Thank you so much and we will be having a transcript as soon as possible on the National Guard's website. And if you have any follow up questions, please reach out to the National Guard Bureau Public Affairs Office. Thank you so much and have a great day.

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