



*Reserve Voice Magazine Special Edition*

# The ROA Story: Power through partnership





**ROA**  
**Reserve Organization of America**

Organized in 1922. Incorporated  
under charter of the Congress by  
Public Law 81-595.

Reserve Voice Magazine Special  
Edition

The ROA Story: Power through  
partnership

**Publisher: Matthew Schwartzman**

**Editor: Maj. Gen. Jeffrey E.  
Phillips, USA (Ret.)**

## ON THE COVER

Photo collage of ROA in  
action with many of its  
mission-partners, including  
the Reserve Forces Policy  
Board (bottom right), Sen.  
Amy Klobuchar (MN) and  
Blue Star Families (bottom  
left), Minority Leader of the  
U.S. House of  
Representatives Hakeem  
Jeffries (middle), U.S. House  
Committee on Veterans'  
Affairs Ranking Member Mark  
Takano (middle), The Military  
Coalition (top right), and the  
Air Force Reserve Advisory  
Council (top left).

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October 2024

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# ROA would like to recognize the following organizations for supporting the U.S. Public Health Service Ready Reserve Corps



Jewish War Veterans  
of the United States of America







# ROA UP TO THE MINUTE MAN UPDATE



(202) 646-7713



1 Constitution Avenue NE,  
Washington D.C. 20002



mschwartzman@roa.org



September 30, 2024

## To the members of our Minute Man Movement:

On behalf of the Reserve Organization of America, I am honored to present to you *The ROA Story: power through partnership*, a Reserve Voice Magazine special publication.

This publication aims to recognize the importance and profound impact of mission-partners “rowing” together toward shared objectives.

This principle extends beyond the Military and Veterans Service Organization community; it is equally vital for executing the National Defense Strategy.

Today, the need for a true “Total Force” with allies and partners is more crucial than ever, as our nation confronts unprecedented threats. Notably, the rise of China.

China has been characterized as America’s “only competitor with the intent and, increasingly, the capacity to reshape the international order.” The rapid modernization of its military is driven by a singular purpose: to “fight and win wars” against a “strong enemy (强敌).” This is evident in China’s expanding missile capabilities.

Recent satellite imagery of the Taklamakan Desert reveals that the Chinese military has constructed targets resembling American aircraft carriers and other U.S. warships, likely to test its anti-carrier capabilities. Concerning, right?

The NDS posits that America is in a “decisive decade,” and I wholeheartedly agree.

As a nation, we must ensure that our military is fully prepared to deter adversaries and, if necessary, engage in and win conflicts against formidable foes.

As part of the “Total Force” community, we must lead by example, because this objective is unattainable without strong partnerships.

Respectfully,

A large, stylized cursive signature of Matthew Schwartzman.

Matthew Schwartzman  
Director, Legislation and Military Policy



# Greetings from ROA's new National Judge Advocate

By: Jesse P. Samluk, PhD, Esquire

**G**reetings! As ROA's new national judge advocate, please allow me to introduce myself. I'm Jesse Samluk. I've been an ROA member for over 20 years.

As for uniformed service experience, I'm prior United States Army Reserve but currently serve in the U.S. Public Health Service Ready Reserve Corps as an assistant engineer officer.

In my civilian capacity, I am a patent examiner for the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office in the cellular communications area.

What led me to become the National Judge Advocate was my participation in the ROA Advocacy Day held on June 13, 2024.



Lt. j.g. Jesse Samluk (left) pictured on ROA's June 13 Advocacy Day after a meeting with the office of Rep. Kathy Castor (FL).

The USPHS Ready Reserve has faced financial difficulty for nearly two years, with the most recent blow resulting from the *Fiscal Responsibility Act*.

This funding recession stopped all monthly drills, related trainings, deployments, and put the futures of the members of the Ready Reserve Corps on unsteady ground.

The ROA Advocacy Day provided multiple opportunities to speak with congressional staff and educate them on who we are and what we lack in terms of parity.



Some staffers were taken aback on the severity of our situation.

Whether any congressional action will be taken remains to be seen, but at least ROA is helping our efforts.

This event squarely fits into the core of ROA's mission: promoting the cause of readiness and the interests of reserve component members, their families, and veterans of reserve service.

To this end, **ROA conducts comprehensive legislative campaigns that ensure reserve force readiness, including for the USPHS Ready Reserve.**

The USPHS, as a whole, is chock full of history of proud service to this nation dating back to 1798. The Ready Reserve Corps, in various incarnations, has existed since 1918, but the present structure was codified into law as part of the *Affordable Care Act* of 2010, and to which the *CARES Act* of 2020 funded.

The USPHS is the only uniformed service in the world that has its mission set on protecting, promoting, and advancing health for the general welfare of the public.


Eliminating this component not only erodes an important capability to combat public health emergencies and other disasters, but it is also a national security issue.

In stepping into the role of ROA's National Judge Advocate, I acknowledge that not only has there been no USPHS representation at the national level in many years, I also have some pretty big shoes to fill.

I follow in the footsteps of retired colonel James Sweeney, USMC.

As an attorney myself, I am eager to not only learn from Judge Sweeney in this role, but am also looking forward to the mentorship and rapport with someone that is currently serving on the bench.

I also would like to acknowledge retired commander Ed Isom and retired captain Sam Wright for their mentorship.

In closing, I'd like to thank ROA's president, Layne Wroblewski, and ROA as a whole for the opportunity to serve! 



Lt. j.g. Jesse Samluk (right) pictured with Cmdr. Yvonne Santiago, ROA national president Layne Wroblewski, and Cmdr. Michelle Barbosa after a meeting with Rep. DesJarlais, M.D., on ROA's June 13 Advocacy Day.





# Creating Contagious Conditions

By: Trey Criner  
Director of Operations



**I**n today's complex and rapidly evolving environment, non-profit organizations must adapt to new challenges while staying true to their core mission and values.

The Reserve Organization of America, dedicated to supporting U.S. national security through a focus on the reserve components, exemplifies how mission-driven efforts can align with broader strategic principles.

Just as the National Defense Strategy emphasizes resilience, collaboration, and adaptability, organizations like ROA must cultivate positive conditions for stakeholder engagement to enhance their impact and sustain their efforts.

This is achieved through building trust, fostering inclusive and collaborative environments, empowering stakeholders, innovating processes, and maintaining a mission focus.

## **Trust through transparent communication**

The NDS highlights the importance of trust and clear communication in strengthening alliances and partnerships.

For ROA and non-profits in general, transparency is crucial for building and maintaining trust with stakeholders, including reserve component service members, veterans, and their families.

I often express my commitment to being “on the road” engaging with the supporters of this great Association.

While integrating technology into our engagement strategy is essential, face-to-face interactions are at times necessary for fostering trust, enhancing collaboration, and invigorating movements.

A notable example is the American Cancer Society (ACS), which faced declining fundraising and engagement in the early 2010s.

To address this, ACS launched an in-person engagement program focused on local community events, volunteer training, and networking opportunities.

By revitalizing face-to-face interactions, ACS fostered stronger relationships and collaboration, ultimately leading to a significant turnaround in its fundraising efforts.

This was evident at the Yellow Ribbon Event (YRE) over Mother's Day weekend in Crystal City, Virginia.

Team ROA, which included Air Force Section Vice President Susan Lukas, life-member Stan Remer, legislation and military policy director Matthew Schwartzman, and myself, engaged with hundreds of Air Force reservists, including the Chief of the Air Force Reserve Lt. Gen. John Healy.





The Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program promotes the well-being of Reserve and National Guard service members and their families by connecting them with resources throughout the deployment cycle and into retirement.

Through initiatives like the STARS in Schools Toolkit and educational programs like the *Servicemember Law Review Center*, ROA supports service members and their families at every stage.

At this event, we unveiled a new platform for engagement: *Have your say with ROA*, hosted by *Trey*. This forum, once

launched, will provide reserve component service members and their families an opportunity to voice their concerns and challenges related to readiness.

Collecting personal accounts is vital to ROA's advocacy, as nothing resonates more with decision-makers than powerful narratives.

These stories will contribute to executive director Jeffrey Phillips' vision for an "outrage file" that humanizes the issues ROA advocates for.



# HAVE YOUR SAY WITH ROA

*Hosted by Trey*

The Reserve Organization of America's advocacy program is focused on readiness. Our advocacy approach is focused on people.

ROA will soon hold a tele-town hall to learn directly from "the deck plates" about how we can help shape *your* military service *your* way.



Learn more about how you can ***Have Your Say with ROA*** and become an integral member of our Minute Man Movement.

 [tcriner@roa.org](mailto:tcriner@roa.org)



By maintaining consistent communication and offering a personalized approach to advocacy, ROA will keep its brand top of mind and better understand those it serves.

YREs are just one “port of entry” for stakeholder engagement.

In June, I visited Seymour-Johnson Air Force Base with my battle-buddy Matthew Schwartzman for a base tour and briefing on the mission and support functions of the 916th Air Refueling Wing.

The insights gained from meeting talented airmen, including ROA members Col. Leonard Sobieski and Lt. Col. Jessica Greening, are being applied to our advocacy efforts today.

## Fostering inclusive and collaborative environments

The NDS emphasizes the value of collaboration and strengthening alliances to address global challenges.

ROA applies this principle by fostering an inclusive environment that values diverse perspectives within the reserve component community.

The military is often described as a microcosm of the nation.

Last July, Blue Star Families held a panel symposium celebrating the 75th anniversary of President Harry Truman’s signing of Executive Order 9981, which integrated the U.S. armed forces in 1948.

## ROA on the road: Seeing more at Seymour-Johnson





This landmark decision, authorized by the very president who signed ROA's congressional charter in 1950, opened opportunities for all Americans to serve in the military, a spirit embodied by ROA's new Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee.



January 12, 1949: Six months after President Harry Truman signed Executive Order 9981, he is seen here conferring with his Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity.

In her feature article in May's *Reserve Voice E-Newsletter*, DEI Committee Chairwoman Retired Air Force Reserve Col. Barbara Ortiz articulated this sentiment: "Members are more likely to stay engaged and committed to an organization where they feel valued, respected, and included."

Engaging stakeholders in meaningful dialogue ensures that ROA's programs and advocacy efforts are responsive to their needs.

Our recent trip to Seymour-Johnson AFB exemplifies this collaborative spirit.

Additionally, ROA has re-established reliable communication with the office of manpower and readiness affairs,

fostering the creation of a Senior Non-Commissioned Officer advisory council within our Army service section.

By providing regular updates on advocacy efforts and policy changes, ROA ensures stakeholders are informed and confident in its ability to represent their interests effectively.

## Empowering and recognizing stakeholders

Empowering allies and partners is a central theme of the NDS, and ROA exemplifies this by focusing on capacity building among its stakeholders.

Providing training, resources, and opportunities for skill development enhances the ability to contribute to an organization's mission.

This revitalization extends to the *ROA Academy*, a professional education forum designed to align grassroots campaigns with national initiatives.

Previously held during the national convention, the academy faced declining interest due to time constraints and information overload.

At our convention in Baton Rouge last year, I proposed quarterly sessions via Zoom to maximize participation, and this year we successfully hosted three academies. Topics included policy advocacy and community engagement.



The upcoming fourth-quarter academy will focus on chapter and department development operations.

We've received positive feedback and encourage members to suggest beneficial topics.

The establishment of an ROA Academy Toolkit webpage serves as a repository for information from these sessions. By empowering stakeholders, ROA not only helps them accomplish great things but also recognizes their achievements, reinforcing a sense of belonging and motivation.

Public recognition and awards validate the efforts of those who support ROA's mission. Celebrating contributions mirrors the feelings experienced during promotion ceremonies, where individuals feel invigorated by new responsibilities.

To foster this sense of belonging, we recently unveiled new lapel pins, including a gold Life Member pin.



Dean Hewitt is the first recipient of the brand new, re-designed ROA Life Member pin. He is pictured with ROA Director of Operations Trey Criner, the designer of the pin, at the South Carolina Department Annual Meeting.

ROA's legislative awards program was also revitalized, with the Reserve Officer Association Legislative Award renamed to the Reserve Organization of America's *Excellence in Legislative Readiness Award*.

The inaugural recipients, Chase Bergerson and Christopher Bennett, exemplify the impact of dedicated advocacy.

## 118th Congress Excellence in Legislative Readiness Awardees



Christopher Bennett, senior professional staff member for the U.S. House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity (pictured middle) with Matthew Schwartzman and Congressman Mike Levin (CA-49).



Chase Bergerson, professional staff member for the U.S. House Committee on Veterans' Affairs (pictured middle) with Matthew Schwartzman and the Committee's Chairman Mike Bost (IL-12).



## Creating feedback loops for continuous improvement

Continuous improvement is a key element of the NDS, advocating for the adaptation of strategies based on evolving threats and lessons learned.

The processes and initiatives detailed in this article showcase how ROA is looking at different ways of engaging with stakeholders and addressing their needs.

By actively listening to feedback, ROA can refine its advocacy strategies and ensure its efforts remain relevant and impactful.

## Aligning strategies with national interest

The NDS stresses the importance of aligning strategies with national interests. For ROA, ensuring that stakeholder engagement practices align with its mission to support and advocate for U.S. national security is crucial.

When stakeholders see ROA operating with integrity and commitment to its mission, they are more likely to connect with the cause and invest in its success.

Creating positive, if not contagious conditions for stakeholder engagement is not just a best

practice; it's a strategic imperative for organizations like ROA.

## Conclusion

By embracing principles from the NDS, ROA enhances its impact and sustainability.

These strategic principles foster strong, enduring relationships with stakeholders, driving more effective advocacy for U.S. national security and the reserve components.

As ROA continues to navigate an evolving landscape, adapting these strategies will be key to fostering a more engaged and supportive community dedicated to the needs of the reserve forces.

Through its commitment to transparency, collaboration, empowerment, feedback, recognition, and mission alignment, ROA not only exemplifies best practices in stakeholder engagement but also reinforces its role as a vital advocate for the U.S. military's reserve components.

In doing so, ROA demonstrates that effective stakeholder engagement is essential for achieving long-term success and fulfilling its mission of supporting U.S. national security through a focus on the reserve components. 





# “The glue pulling everyone together”

On Sept. 23, U.S. deputy surgeon general Rear Admiral Denise Hinton met with ROA’s legislation and military policy director Matthew Schwartzman for an insightful conversation about her career, her family’s military legacy, and the vital mission of the USPHS RRC.



# A conversation with Rear Admiral Denise Hinton



## Official Transcript

**Matt:** Thank you, Admiral, for meeting with me today.

Can you start by telling our readers at home about yourself and your background?

**RADM Hinton:** Thank you, Matt. I really appreciate you taking the time to have this conversation. I grew up in a military family.

My dad served in the Air Force for about 26 years before retiring as a Chief Master Sergeant. My uncle,

Melvin Morris, Sr. is a living congressional medal of honor recipient for his acts of valor in the Vietnam War.

I also have had many family members that have served our great nation in uniform.

That exposure to the community and wanting to have the commitment to serve in uniform is what drove me to join the Air Force after graduating from the Florida State School of Nursing.



I served in the Air Force for about eight and a half years before transitioning to the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps, where my initial position at the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) was as a regulatory health project manager in the Center for Drug Evaluation and Research, Division of Cardiovascular and Renal Products and progressed to various levels of leadership with the last being as the Chief Scientist.

**Matt:** For those who may not be familiar, can you speak more about your role as a regulatory health project manager at the FDA?

**RADM Hinton:** In this role, Matt, you're really the **glue that pulls everyone together.**

I coordinated multidisciplinary teams, including, physicians, nurses, chemists and pharmacists, to navigate the drug approval process.

I was responsible for reviewing administrative and scientific aspects of Investigational New Drug and New Drug submissions to ensure compliance with current laws, regulations and established FDA policies. This included review of prescription product labels and facilitation of meetings with industry partners to ensure safe and effective prescription drugs reach the market.

From there, I progressively

## About Sergeant First Class Melvin Morris Sr.



Medal of Honor recipient Melvin Morris Sr. was born in Okmulgee, Okla., Jan. 7, 1942.

Sgt. 1st Class Morris entered the Oklahoma Army National Guard in 1959 and later requested to join the active Army. He became one of the first soldiers to don the green beret at the command of President John F. Kennedy, Fort Bragg, N.C., in 1961. Fort Bragg has since been renamed to Fort Liberty. Morris volunteered twice for deployments to Vietnam.

Sgt. 1st Class Morris was recognized for his valorous actions on Sept. 17, 1969, while commanding the Third Company, Third Battalion of the IV Mobile Strike Force near Chi Lang.

Then-Staff Sgt. Morris led an advance across enemy lines to retrieve a fallen comrade and single-handedly destroyed an enemy force that had pinned his battalion from a series of bunkers. Staff Sgt. Morris was shot three times as he ran



back toward friendly lines with the American casualties, but did not stop until he reached safety.

The Distinguished Service Cross was awarded to then Staff Sgt. Morris in April 1970 for extraordinary heroism during this 1969 battle. After receiving the award, he returned to Vietnam the same month for his second tour. He was subsequently awarded the Medal of Honor in 2014.



promoted through various roles over the course of my time in the USPHS and FDA.

**Matt:** How has the healthcare industry changed since you began your career in the FDA?

**RADM Hinton:** The healthcare community has changed quite a bit.

I would say that seeing the healthcare enterprise and industry from different perspectives throughout my career while serving in clinical and regulatory setting certainly helps to lend perspective.

It evolved significantly pre-, during, and post-COVID pandemic - we have continuously seen changes with innovation in healthcare, collaboration, communication, and technological advances to name a few.

Key lessons include the importance

of partnership, communication, and evidence-based practices.

The pandemic highlighted the need for clear messaging and adaptability as circumstances change.

It's crucial for all stakeholders, including the public and legislators, to understand developments and communicate the evolution of them at every level as we progress.

But perhaps above all else, making sure there's evidence-based practices so that we can effectively execute our mission.

**Matt:** Can you share what it was like to be in the Public Health Service during COVID-19?

**RADM Hinton:** It was an eye-opening, stressful, and inspiring experience to see our Public Health Service officers fulfill our mission: to protect, promote, and advance the health and safety of the nation.

We also had the rippling effects of unprecedented deployments.

Many officers were deployed to communities in need, adapting quickly to new challenges like PPE training and setting up community-based testing sites.

We had to be nimble and adapt to change quickly. The USPHS Commissioned Corps does incredible



work globally.

The COVID19 pandemic was unprecedented and upended lives of many across the world.

Because it was unprecedented, it took some time to understand the coronavirus and what was needed to diagnose, treat, and prevent people from contracting it or dying from it.

What sincerely sticks out for and impressed me was how we as a nation came together to problem solve—plan, do, check, act, communicate, assess actions, tools, resources, and needs throughout and worked collaboratively to adjust accordingly for the betterment of public health.

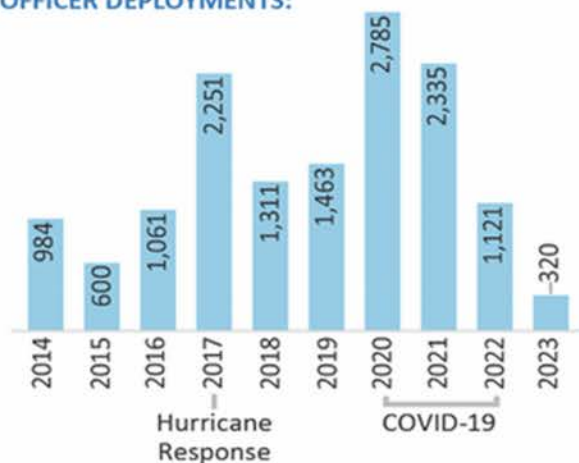
I am proud that we, as a nation, came together to ensure we put scientific and evidence-based practices in place to strengthen the global health security framework to prevent, detect and respond to COVID 19 which will help inform our actions in future pandemic threats.

I am proud that our efforts and partnerships in the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) USPHS, DoD Military Treatment Facilities, pharmaceutical industry, and other federal partners resulted in the development, manufacturing, and availability of safe and effective COVID19 vaccines that decreased incidence of severe illness and death from the coronavirus.

We utilized the expertise of all our multidisciplinary officers from across the services and united for one mission.

#### COMMISSIONED CORPS OFFICER DEPLOYMENTS AND DEPLOYMENT DAYS

##### OFFICER DEPLOYMENTS:



##### DEPLOYMENT DAYS:



Source: <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/fy-2025-budget-inbrief.pdf>

**Matt:** Looking back, what lessons did you learn about the service during COVID-19?

**RADM Hinton:** Looking back, it really comes down to operational readiness and effective communication and understanding the USPHS Commissioned Corps' functions, capabilities, and the mission.



Officers served in dual roles 24/7—both as Public Health Service officers and in their specific agency positions—demonstrating the importance of public health expertise in various situations, such as setting up community-based testing sites and decontamination efforts for infection prevention and control.

The pandemic emphasized the need for continuous public health readiness and collaboration around the clock.

One of HHS's paramount responsibilities is to protect Americans from public health threats. The continued increase in infectious disease outbreaks over the last twenty years presents a vulnerability to our national security.

The USPHS Commissioned Corps is positioned to be at the forefront of the nation's response to these outbreaks.

Public Health Service officers have the skills and expertise to respond to future threats. Due to the growing threats, **the number of officers with these skills needs to expand** so the nation is ready to respond to any potential risks associated with biological incidents and help combat serious modern biothreats impacting the American people, whether from natural disease outbreaks, accidents involving high consequence pathogens, or the actions of terrorists.

**Matt:** You mentioned earlier that the unprecedented level of deployments had rippling effects on the Public Health Service officers deployed during COVID-19.

Can you discuss the ripple effects that COVID-19 has had on the nation's medical infrastructure?

**RADM Hinton:** COVID-19 revealed gaps in our public health infrastructure and highlighted the need for more officers.

It became clear that **legislative support is necessary** for deploying officers outside of public health emergencies.

We needed to ensure agencies are not strained by deployments, which led to the idea of a Public Health Emergency Response Strike Team for rapid deployment and the USPHS Ready Reserve Corps to fill skill gaps efficiently.

That said, a challenge we faced, and continue to face, is not having the legislative authorities needed to provide benefits and entitlements to support those who are supporting our mission.

Many of the services and federal partners are experiencing workforce gaps due to burnout or choice to serve in non-uniformed careers. The USPHS provides an opportunity to provide public health expertise and further strengthen our national health security.



**Matt:** As you know, Admiral, ROA has been a steadfast champion for the Public Health Service and its Ready Reserve Corps.

Even without benefits parity or the policy levers required to manage the force, can you talk about how the Officers of the Ready Reserve Corps have been a value add to the Public Health Service?

**RADM Hinton:** Our Ready Reserve officers have really been a key asset, need, and benefit for the USPHS and Department of Health and Human Services as a whole.

I truly appreciate our Ready Reservists for committing their time and talent to our service. They are so competent - so ably serve.

Their commitment has filled staffing shortages, but **we need sustainable funding to maintain and grow the Ready Reserve Corps**, ensuring we can respond effectively to ongoing and future public health needs.

You already know, Matt, because ROA is also communicating the need and fighting with us to raise the visibility for the need of funding to preserve this public health capability.

**Matt:** Can you paint the picture of the challenges that would exist if you had to execute your mission absent funding for the Ready Reserve Corps?

**RADM Hinton:** I appreciate that question. **If funding isn't restored, it will have a negative impact.**

We would lose the ability to quickly mobilize a Ready Reserve force with unique skill sets to deploy for the DHHS/USPHS in response to regional, national, and global health emergencies and improve access to health services in our underserved and underrepresented communities.

When there is a need or a gap in technical expertise, **the USPHS ready reservists are always ready and able** to employ their real-world experience.

If that's lost, it impacts the missions of not only the Public Health Service, but other federal entities such as the VA, Coast Guard, and NOAA. It is a capability that has been realized and is needed.

We need to continue to maintain a reserve component just as all the other services have.

And we have the other services asking for our help and services to help meet their workforce gaps and challenges.

**Matt:** Admiral, what are the biggest challenges facing the Public Health Service today, and how can they be addressed?

**RADM Hinton:** One major challenge is



increasing visibility for the Public Health Service as one of the eight uniformed services, so people understand our unique mission to best understand what is needed to fully fulfill our mission as a service.

We also face issues with funding reauthorization, which is crucial for maintaining our readiness, especially for the Ready Reserve. Key areas of focus include ensuring parity in benefits like leave and entitlements, which impacts recruitment and retention.

If our reservists don't receive the same leave as their counterparts in other services, it impacts our recruitment, retention, morale and well-being of the officers.

Formal training is also vital.

**We need funding to train alongside other services**, especially in joint exercises that incorporate public health expertise.

This strengthens joint uniformed service partnerships, skillsets, and capabilities to ensure personnel are familiar with necessary protocols, lingo, when deployed together for humanitarian, public health emergencies and other missions.

Additionally, **we need uninterrupted access to TRICARE and health benefits for reservists**, the ability to transfer the GI Bill, and military leave rights during

during deployment. It's essential that the reserve component be included in the overarching Title 10 structure, as they were unintentionally omitted in past legislation.

We're actively educating Congress to address these gaps, as these changes will strengthen our service now and in the future.



Rear Admiral Denise Hinton gives legislation and military policy director Matthew Schwartzman a history lesson on USPHS joint-operations, beginning with a 1914 Act authorizing the U.S. Public Health Service Officers to serve on U.S. Coast Guard vessels.

**Matt:** ROA couldn't agree more with your assessment, Admiral.

Now, I know you mentioned at the beginning of our conversation that you come from a military family, which informed your decision to serve.

For those public health patriots who are considering serving in the Public Health Service, what would you say are the best reasons for joining?



**RADM Hinton:** The USPHS has multidisciplinary public health professionals serving in approximately 800 locations across the 50 states and U.S. territories.

Serving in the U.S. Public Health Service provides a unique opportunity to impact communities directly.

Whether you're a physician, nurse, pharmacist, veterinarian, engineer or other public health specialist, there's a place for you.

You can make a tangible difference both nationally and globally in protecting, promoting and advancing the health and safety of our nation.

**Matt:** Can you share your feelings when you learned you'd be serving as the U.S. Deputy Surgeon General?

**RADM Hinton:** I was surprised when the U.S. Surgeon General called and a bit nervous about the prospect of transitioning from the FDA during a pandemic.

It has been an incredible honor, and I'm grateful for the support I've received since being appointed into this position and throughout my 31 years of service.

I don't take it for granted and I'm appreciative. And let me just say, my journey has been shaped foundationally by inspirational leaders and colleagues. Mentorship

and collaboration are crucial in advancing one's career.

I emphasize the importance of networking and building relationships, as these "soft skills" are just as vital as the technical expertise and capabilities we are required to possess in each of our roles.

**I am proud to serve our nation** alongside phenomenal USPHS officers and civil servants.

**Matt:** One of the things that I've learned early in my career is to view those in your network as partners, not competitors.

As you may know, ROA recently did an exclusive interview to spotlight the powerful partnership between the Public Health Service and the National Guard Bureau.

Can you discuss some of the other mission-partners that the USPHS has?

**RADM Hinton:** As you know, Matt, partnerships are essential for our success. We collaborate with various agencies, including DOD, NOAA, Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), the Department of Homeland Security, which includes the USCG, and DOI/National Park Service to bolster our collective capabilities.

These relationships ensure that we can meet workforce needs effectively, particularly in areas



like public health and national health security.

For instance, our officers support the VA and other agencies, addressing critical needs like mental health services. Collaborating across sectors amplifies our mission's impact.

**Matt:** Thank you again, Admiral, for sitting down to talk with me. We at ROA deeply value our partnership as we advocate for the resources needed to safeguard the nation's health.

**RADM Hinton:** Thank you, Matt. **Our partnership with ROA has been critically important**, and it's also one that is rooted in communication and trust.

**Your advocacy has been instrumental** in identifying and addressing the needs of the Public Health Service Commissioned Corps, especially regarding funding challenges and need for parity with entitlements and benefits such as parental leave.

I would also say that the **collaboration among organizations like ROA, MOAA, and COA is vital** to our mission and the well-being of our officers.

So, we are really, really appreciative and are grateful for all that ROA has brought to the table and will continue to bring the table in the future. **Thank you for your partnership.**

## Conclusion

In the intricate web of public health, few roles are as pivotal as that of the Deputy Surgeon General.

With over 30 years of distinguished service, RADM Hinton's career is a testament to her dedication to improving the lives of countless Americans.


From our conversation, it's clear that the USPHS Commissioned Corps and its Ready Reserve Corps play a pivotal role in maintaining Total Force medical readiness and public health preparedness.

The USPHS not only bridges the gap between military and civilian healthcare but also ensures that our nation's health security is a top priority.

By fostering a unified approach to medical readiness, the USPHS empowers and supports all branches of service to respond effectively to both routine and emergent health challenges, ultimately enhancing our nation's resilience.

As we look ahead, the continued strength and adaptability of the USPHS will be crucial in sustaining this vital connection, ensuring that our healthcare forces are always prepared to serve and protect the American people.

From ROA's perspective, the USPHS RRC can be the glue pulling everyone together to ensure our nation's medical readiness.

It's now up to Congress to restore the funding for the USPHS RRC rescinded by the *Fiscal Responsibility Act* and respond to ROA's calls to action. 



# Answering the wake up call

An inside look into the creation of the U.S. Public Health Service Ready Reserve Corps with Rear Admiral Joan Hunter



In an era marked by unprecedented public health challenges, the U.S. Public Health Service has emerged as a steadfast guardian of the nation's health.

Established in 1798, this esteemed uniformed service has adapted through centuries, responding to crises with resilience and expertise.

At the forefront of these efforts is the Ready Reserve Corps, a specialized group of health professionals poised to act swiftly in emergencies, from natural disasters to pandemics.

Despite its rich history, the USPHS did not have a functional reserve component until the *Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act* was signed into law in 2020.

The RRC was established as part of a larger modernization effort to enhance the USPHS' capabilities and support the medical readiness of its uniformed services counterparts.

Since its establishment, even without adequate funding, recruiting and retention tools, envisioned end-strength, or a codified structure, the USPHS RRC has proven its effectiveness and potential.

It has augmented the National Guard Bureau's medical teams during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, supported Operation Allies Welcome to ensure evacuees received medical care, provided care at the National Park Service's Yosemite clinic, delivered no-cost healthcare to vulnerable populations through the Department of Defense's innovative readiness training missions, and more.



USPHS officer, attached to Task Force Holloman, provides Afghan evacuees with vaccinations on Sept. 26, 2021, providing Afghan evacuees support at locations outside Afghanistan (U.S. Army photo by Pfc. Anthony Sanchez)



The Behavioral Health team serving 10,000 Afghan refugees in Operation Allies Welcome near Fort Bliss, Texas. U.S. Public Health Services photo courtesy of Lt. Karisha Harvey (Photo Credit: U.S. Army)



Martin Army Community Hospital's Department of Behavioral Health Intensive Outpatient Program Chief, Lt. Karisha Harvey, and linguist Hameed helped 10,000 Afghan refugees during Operation Allies Welcome near Fort Bliss, Texas. U.S. Public Health Services photo courtesy of Lt. Karisha Harvey.

The creation and growth of the RRC would not have been possible without the vision, support, and leadership of retired rear admiral Joan Hunter, a notable figure in the USPHS and American history.

After earning a bachelor of science degree in nursing and a master's degree in social work, she joined the USPHS in 1992, embarking on a distinguished career that would span over three decades.



In 2016, she was promoted to rear admiral as Director of USPHS Commissioned Corps Headquarters, significantly contributing to public health policy and practice, including playing a crucial role in establishing the RRC.

Recognizing the need for a flexible and rapid response mechanism for public health crises, she advocated for its creation, emphasizing training and preparedness for members to ensure effective responses.

Admiral Hunter graciously provided ROA with an inside look into the creation of the RRC in her very own words.



# Q&A with ROA and Retired Rear Admiral Joan Hunter

## Rear Adm. Hunter: In her own words



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As a reserve component, we highlighted the need to identify and utilize state, local, and community assets and resources. **Our reserve component is a tremendous asset to and for our country.**

**ROA:** *Why did you join the U.S. Public Health Service?*

**RADM Hunter:** In 1992, when first offered a position in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, I had to make a choice: to become an employee in the civil service system or an officer in the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps.

It was the mission of the Corps [to protect, promote, and advance the health and safety of the Nation] that made my decision easy.

Born and raised in a rural state, I learned access to affordable quality health care could be a challenge. I was motivated to make a difference.

**ROA:** *What did you enjoy most about your service in the USPHS?*

**RADM Hunter:** Opportunities are everywhere. In many cases Commissioned Corps officers have the ability to apply and if selected, be assigned to a wide variety of direct health care or health related management positions within HHS or to many other federal departments and/or agencies.

**ROA:** *What were some of the challenges you faced during your time in the USPHS and how did you overcome them?*





**RADM Hunter:** The USPHS Commissioned Corps remains a relatively unknown uniformed service and is small compared to the other uniformed services.

In most cases, officers are responsible for managing their own careers.

Unlike our armed forces, the USPHS Commissioned Corps does not have a Force managed personnel structure.

Some might consider that a challenge, however it also offers incredible opportunities.

I was able to use that autonomy to explore very different assignments. I took risks and chose relatively unknown assignments at the time.

As a result, I had some of the most unique and rewarding experiences- and through those assignments I learned to become a leader and an advocate.

“

After the coronavirus pandemic, it became apparent **our country needed a dedicated reserve** of experienced health professionals to respond to emergencies on an as-needed basis.

-Rear Adm. Joan Hunter



**ROA:** *For those “public health patriots” considering service in the USPHS, what would you say are the best reasons for joining?*

**RADM Hunter:** A career in the USPHS Commissioned Corps will be what you decide to make of it.

If you're motivated and dedicated to our mission and values, you won't be disappointed.

**ROA:** *In your view, why didn't the USPHS have an operational Reserve Component until the CARES Act was signed into law in 2020?*

**RADM Hunter:** The USPHS Commissioned Corps has gone through many transitions since 1889 when Congress created the Commissioned Corps in response to a shortage of health care providers in the Marine Hospital Service.

Our transitions have been driven primarily by the health care needs of our citizens.

After the coronavirus pandemic, it became apparent our country needed a dedicated reserve of experienced health professionals to respond to regional, national and global health emergencies on an as-needed basis.

The USPHS Commissioned Corps Ready Reserve is the most logical Service to fulfill that need.



**ROA:** *What was your inspiration for supporting the establishment of the USPHS RRC?*

**RADM Hunter:** From 2008-2016, I was assigned to the Department of Defense, National Guard Bureau to build a psychological health program for Guard Members and their families.

Our goal was to strengthen individual readiness and enhance medical readiness by promoting individual and family resilience.

As a reserve component, we highlighted the need to identify and utilize state, local, and community assets and resources.

Through this assignment, I learned the value of a dedicated cadre of service members who are aligned with common goals and mission- and have the flexibility to rotate and surge on an as-needed basis for our nation's defense.

I believe our reserve component is a tremendous asset to and for our country.

**ROA:** *What was your vision for the role(s) of the USPHS RRC in executing USPHS' mission to protect, promote, and advance the health and safety of the nation?*

**RADM Hunter:** To build a dedicated cadre of health care professionals known as the USPHS RRC who are well trained to respond, on an as-needed basis, to health emergencies.



Rear Adm. Joan Hunter, then the director of psychological health for the National Guard Bureau, and Kevin Crowley, former deputy director for manpower and personnel, listen as Army Gen. Frank Grass, the chief of the National Guard Bureau, conducts a town hall meeting with staff at the Army National Guard Readiness Center at Arlington Hall Station in Arlington, Va., on Nov. 19, 2012. (Army National Guard photo by Sgt. 1st Class Jim Greenhill)

**ROA:** *Can you take our readers “behind the scenes” and speak to what it was like to be a part of the process of establishing the USPHS RRC?*

**RADM Hunter:** Inspirational. One of our early actions was to establish a Memorandum of Understanding between HHS, the USPHS Commissioned Corps and the National Guard Bureau.

This gave us the authority to work together, enhance knowledge and offered better outcomes for both our missions.

There were so many lessons learned for transforming the USPHS RCC to an operational Force; policy guidance, disaster response operations, the importance of internal and external coalitions, employer support and a basic understanding of the requisite authorities and responsibilities for managing an operational Ready Reserve.



**ROA:** Last June, Congress signed legislation eliminating funding for the USPHS RRC beginning in FY 2025. In response, 12 former and acting Surgeons General wrote a letter to congressional leaders urging support for providing funding to sustain the USPHS RRC.

*Why should Congress invest in the USPHS RRC program?*

**RADM Hunter:** In my opinion, the coronavirus pandemic was a wake-up call; essentially a warning for our country's leaders.

We need to be better prepared for the next unknown biological threat or pandemic. Effective preparedness and planning for future public health emergencies is now.

Investing now in our USPHS RCC is investing for our public health future and safety. A well-trained, ready, health care workforce prepared to respond with boots on the ground will save time and money- and most importantly save lives.

“

**Investing now** in our U.S. Public Health Service Ready Reserve Corps **is investing for our public health future and safety.**

-Rear Adm. Joan Hunter



**ROA:** On Aug. 1, ROA interviewed representatives from the USPHS and National Guard Bureau to discuss their joint efforts in securing medical readiness.

*Considering you also wore a “dual-hat” with the National Guard Bureau as its director for psychological health, can you speak to the power of this partnership and its impact on Total Force medical readiness?*

**RADM Hunter:** Based on my experience, without a doubt the power of partnership ensured better outcomes for both parties.

For example, I was able to draw on the expertise of many specialists at HHS, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

SAMHSA professionals generously provided expert guidance, thereby ensuring we utilized evidence-based practices for standards in all 54 states and territories.

Together we drafted core guiding principles, expectations, processes and policies to ensure high quality-care service delivery for our service members and their families.

In addition, National Guard leaders such as various State Adjutants General, chaplains, other military support and transition program leaders, and Guard legal experts all helped to build the foundation for the National Guard Psychological Health Program.

**Partnerships are powerful.**




# Conclusion

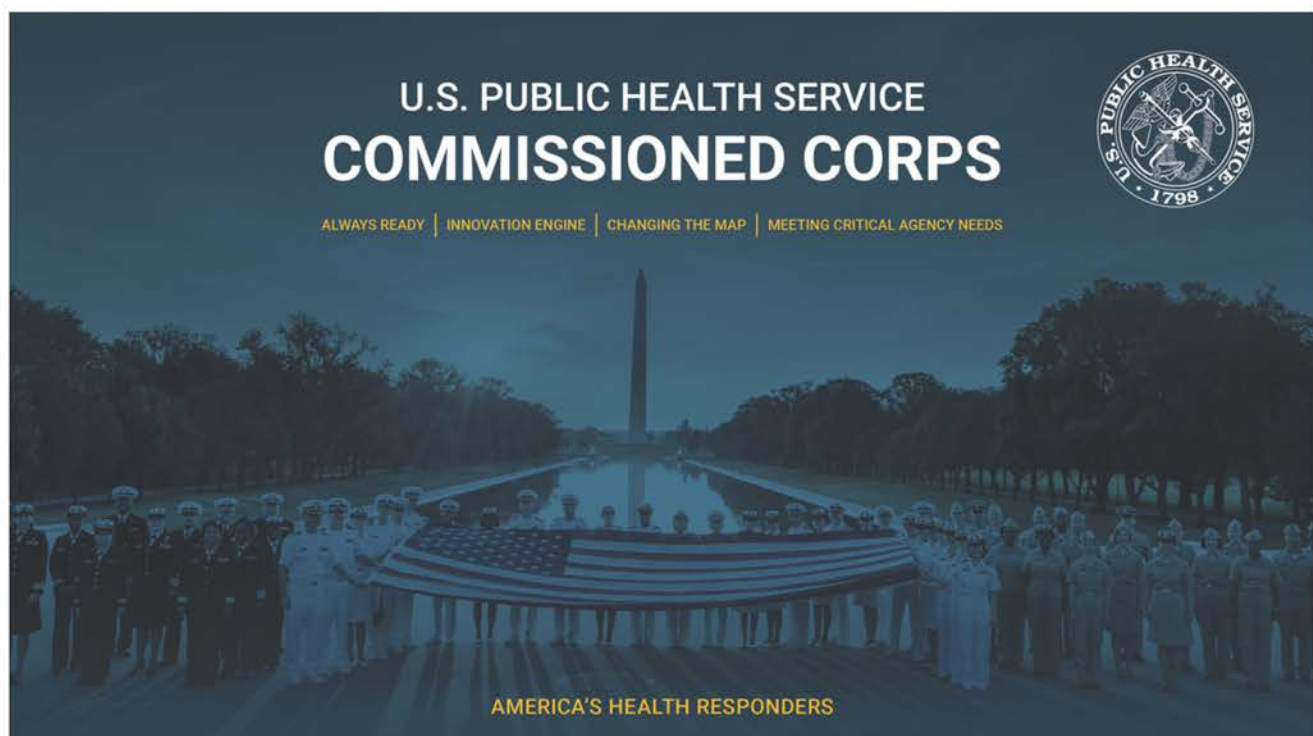
As we reflect on Rear Adm. Joan Hunter's remarkable journey and the establishment of the USPHS Ready Reserve Corps, it becomes clear that our nation stands at a critical crossroads in public health.

Hunter's insights remind us that the challenges we face are not insurmountable but rather opportunities for growth and innovation. The pandemic served as a wake-up call, illuminating the need for a well-prepared, agile healthcare workforce ready to meet future threats head-on.

Investing in the USPHS RRC is not merely a fiscal decision; it is a commitment to safeguarding our health and well-being for generations to come.

As we look toward the future, let us honor the vision of leaders like Rear Adm. Hunter by advocating for sustainable solutions that enhance our public health infrastructure. In doing so, we not only protect our communities but also fortify the very foundation of our nation's resilience in the face of uncertainty.

From ROA's perspective, the path forward is clear: we must answer the call, invest wisely, and prepare diligently, for the health and national security of our nation depends on it. 







# What I see in TMC

By: Matthew Schwartzman  
Director, Legislation and Military Policy

**G**rowing up, my dad would tell me “Matt, the months go slow, but the years go fast.” Well, being an advocate puts that saying to the test.

I believe I’m a forward-thinking person. Stopping to “smell the roses” isn’t natural to me.

Nonetheless, I decided to challenge myself this Aug. recess by reflecting on my time in The Military Coalition.

This began with a vivid recollection of my first meeting with TMC partners at

the Defense Health Agency over five years ago.

The focus of the meeting was Sec. 703 of the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2017, which enabled the Department of Defense to “restructure” or “right-size” Military Treatment Facilities.

Looking back, it’s safe to say this meeting was my “welcome to the National Football League” moment.

Following the meeting, I returned to my



office, then located at the Air Force Sergeants Association's headquarters, where my boss, retired Air Force master sergeant Keith Reed, asked me for a debrief.

"How did the meeting go?" Keith asked.

"I honestly couldn't tell you, Mr. Reed," I replied, signaling with my hand that the information covered was over my head.

"But if you give me a few days, I can."

I spent the next several days reading about the Military Health System and how it was in a period of significant transformation. I could relate.

The next week, with a manila folder containing hundreds of pages of highlighted excerpts and personal notes, I met with Keith again.

Considering I didn't get fired for incompetence, I would say the briefing was successful.

I didn't realize it then, but that process established a standard of preparedness I strive to maintain and instill in ROA's legislative intern(s) today.

I mean this literally.

Last Dec., I was set to attend a DHA leadership meeting, when an unexpected conflict consumed my calendar.

I asked ROA's second-quarter legislative intern, Jake Fales, to take my place.

In his departing memoir *My Time at ROA*, published in the June edition of ROA's *Reserve*

*Voice Magazine*, Jake recounted the experience:

“

Matt believes in trial by fire. For me, that meant being the sole representative for ROA at a Defense Health Agency executive session within my first few weeks. This experience made me curious to learn more. And learn more I did.

-Jake Fales



ROA's Jake Fales commands a podium at the pentagon.



Like Jake, I've learned more since that first DHA meeting over five years ago.

Not just about the MHS, but about advocacy – about TMC.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines advocacy as “the act or process of supporting a cause or proposal.”

I find this definition to be technically correct, but practically insufficient.

To me, advocacy is the art of influencing others to adopt an agenda as if it were theirs. Thus, advocates are artists – the minds of decision-makers their canvases.

Growing up, my mom took me to drawing classes.

Because of those classes, I'm a better drawer than a painter.

Holding a paintbrush isn't natural to me.

Nonetheless, I decided to challenge myself in my public-school art classes by becoming a better painter.

I was especially inspired by Andy Warhol's ability to colorize iconic pop-culture elements without distortion.

Walking the tightrope of change and classicalism was difficult for Warhol, who ironically once said “They always say time changes things, but you actually have to change them yourself.”

Yet, with works including Marilyn Diptych and the Muhammad Ali series, he walked that tightrope successfully.



Pictured bottom: Andy Warhol (1928-1987), Marilyn Monroe (Marilyn) 1967.  
Pictured top: Andy Warhol, Muhammad Ali, 1978.



## Socialization = Legislation

By: Keith Reed, Chief Executive, AFSA

The TMC Social aims to foster a spirit of unity and collaboration among the individuals who make up our Military and Veteran Service Organizations.

As a coalition, our joint mission is to support those who are serving, those who have served, and their families and caregivers.

To be the best version of ourselves, as a coalition, we must know one another personally and professionally. By fostering deeper connections, we will enhance the impact of our efforts.

When it comes to the legislative process, personal connection and trust are crucial to ensuring our message resonates with lawmakers and their staff.

When TMC demonstrates a well coordinated and organized campaign that reflects the interests of our broad base of constituents, key stakeholders in Congress are more likely to listen and act accordingly.

This event will serve as a platform for organizations to connect, exchange ideas, and build partnerships that enhance our ability to serve our constituents.

LEARN MORE ABOUT AFSA: [WWW.HQAFSA.ORG](http://WWW.HQAFSA.ORG)

Warhol's works and words can and should be placed in the context of advocacy and TMC.

The "iconic pop-culture element," in this analogy, is partnerships.

Partnerships are the name of the advocacy game. They are also the key to building a successful coalition effort.

In a standing coalition, however, partnership must transcend conditions-based transactions based on temporarily shared interests.

Partnership must be formed by a collaboration-centered mindset and trustworthy operational model.

Trust takes time and energy – scarce resources for an enterprise whose engine is fueled by volunteers.

That said, results follow when organizations in a standing coalition invest time and energy in one another.

Look no further than the TEAM Coalition securing the codification of the PACT Act and TMC's Star Act Working Group garnering historic bi-partisan support.

I'm thankful for the relationships I have in TMC. I owe much to many for all I've learned and the support I've received.

I want all TMC representatives and future advocates to feel the same.

Following this realization, I reflected on how that could be achieved. I recalled an idea spearheaded by Keith within the last year: a TMC social.



As a legislative aide in the Maryland General Assembly, my favorite day of the legislative session was (by a slim margin) the last one, referred to in Latin as Sine-Die (Sigh-Neh Dye).

Not because of the seemingly endless number of receptions, not because I was looking forward to having some downtime following an intensive legislative session, but because of the camaraderie between and among professional staff and the state's elected officials.

Remarkably, even though we all gathered to celebrate our accomplishments, the conversations suddenly shifted to the work still ahead. Here we were not even finished with the final vote for the current legislative session, already looking forward to the first vote of the next one.

Fast forward from April 8, 2019, to Jan. 3, 2023 (the first day of the 118th Congress), I found myself in familiar territory, traveling from office to office for many "open house" meetings.

This was (by a slim margin) my favorite day of a legislative session with ROA.

Not because of the seemingly endless number of receptions, not because I was looking forward to having some downtime following an intensive legislative session, but because of the camaraderie between and among advocates and the nation's elected officials.

And so, even though the 118th Congress had not been sworn in, even though

committee assignments had not been announced, even though we had just gathered to celebrate what we had accomplished in the preceding session, I found the conversation suddenly shifting to the work ahead.

Sound familiar?

These experiences taught me that events held at the beginning and end of a legislative session provide unique opportunities for partnerships to form and flourish.

With Keith's social proposal as the "foundation," the idea to hold a TMC congressional "kick-off" event was borne.

## ROA-AFSA Proposal: 119th Congress Kick-Off

In Oct. 2024, AFSA and ROA submitted a joint proposal to TMC requesting a congressional "kick-off" event for the 119th Congress.

The event would begin with a revival of the famous TMC 101 "briefing," followed by a TMC "Hill Day" and conclude with an "inaugural social" hosted on or near the Capitol Hill complex.





At those “open house” meetings, I wasn’t just representing ROA – I was representing TMC.

In the beginning of the 118th Congress, I drafted a welcoming news release for TMC and sent it to hundreds of hill offices.

The news release prompted a productive dialogue with more than 30 staffers in the first few weeks of the legislative session.

Those relationships were essential to many TMC campaigns, including extending TRICARE Reserve Select coverage to survivors of reserve component members from six months to three years.

Thanks to the activity and energy of its supporters, TMC is well respected and known on Capitol Hill, particularly with Armed Services and Veterans’ Affairs Committee staff.

What I learned from that experience, however, is that many congressional offices don’t know who TMC is or what it advocates.

Make no mistake, there is sage wisdom to focusing on TMC’s “core customers.”

One of my favorite quotes (and there are many) from Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius is “People who labor all their lives but have no purpose to direct every thought and impulse toward are wasting their time, even when hard at work.”

But if there’s one thing I’ve learned from my advocacy experience, it’s that you never truly know when a partnership may come in handy.

And if I’ve learned anything from getting to know the representatives of TMC, it’s that everyone has something unique to offer.


This is why, in addition to reinforcing positive conditions for collaboration between and among TMC representatives (and TMC organizations by extension), I believe a TMC congressional kick-off would create sustainable conditions for working relations between TMC and members of Congress and their staff.

*Win-win.*

Now, it would be naïve to suggest that in a standing coalition of organizations with “competing” interests, there won’t be disagreement.

It took TMC close to two years to approve its most recent membership agreement, after all.

I would suggest, however, that when “labor” is focused on building relationships between TMC representatives and partnerships between its organizations, what I see is a formidable force to be reckoned with.

What I see in TMC is a force of good for the military and veterans service organization community and the constituencies we collectively represent. 





# The ROA Story: Fighting for the U.S. Public Health Service Ready Reserve





Recalling its successful 1970s campaign to save the Coast Guard Reserve, ROA has been fighting to restore rescinded funding for the U.S. Public Health Service Ready Reserve Corps.

Following U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen's dire warning in April 2023 that the United States would run out of cash by the first of June if Congress failed to raise or suspend the debt limit, President Biden called for a meeting of congressional leaders to address the issue.

The risk of a historic default threatened essential federal functions, including national defense and public health services.

The resulting bi-partisan solution, Public Law No: 118-5, known as the *Fiscal Responsibility Act*, was signed into law on June 3. This legislation imposed severe spending cuts across federal programs, placing many, including the USPHS RRC, on the budgetary chopping block.

Matthew Schwartzman, ROA's legislation and military policy director, confirmed the cuts after consulting with a trusted public health professional on June 6 and briefed ROA's executive director, retired Army major general Jeffrey Phillips. "Well, Matthew, it's time to fight," Phillips responded.

ROA swiftly adapted its June 8 agenda for The Military Coalition's Guard and Reserve Committee to include presentations from USPHS representatives on their mission and current challenges. That week, smoke from catastrophic Canadian wildfires blanketed many U.S. cities, including Washington D.C., ominously highlighting the critical need for robust public health systems.



A smoky haze blanketed the D.C. area June 8, 2023. (Photo by WTOP, Alejandro Alvarez)



Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen leaves a meeting on April 21. She warns that economic chaos will ensue if Congress doesn't raise the debt ceiling in the coming weeks. (Photo by Alex Wong Getty Images).

"This challenging air quality is a stark reminder of why Congress must support our public health mission," Schwartzman emphasized at the meeting.

The Committee voted unanimously to form a working group, led by ROA and the Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service, dedicated to supporting the USPHS RRC.

Since the USPHS RRC's establishment in 2020, ROA has fought for the readiness



and wellbeing of its members.

At the start of the 118th Congress, ROA collaborated with the USPHS Commissioned Corps, to discuss proposals aimed at achieving the service's desired end strength.

This partnership led to a significant education forum in March 2023, resulting in the introduction of a landmark benefits parity package for the USPHS RRC.

However, the FRA's discretionary spending caps halted progress on many pending proposals, including S.2297 and ROA's efforts to restore USPHS RRC funding.

Needing a more formidable "show of force," ROA planned an ambitious Advocacy Day for June 13, 2024, just before the final amendment submission deadline for the Senate's version of the annual defense bill and in anticipation of Congress' Aug. recess.

The goal was simple: broaden congressional support for the USPHS RRC.

Over three days, ROA orchestrated a comprehensive outreach campaign to over 100 congressional offices, securing 30 meetings.

"D-Day" began at ROA's MMB at 0830, with Executive Director Phillips delivering opening remarks about the USPHS' capabilities.

"As a brigadier general, I commanded Fort Stewart, Georgia, during the Iraq deployment of the 3rd Infantry Division stationed there," said Phillips. "With the division's medical staff deployed, the

## History of the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps

1798

John Adams signs into law the *Act for the Relief of Sick and Disabled Seamen*, which triggers the creation of marine hospitals along major American highways.

1870

The Marine Hospital Service centralizes administration under the leadership of the supervising surgeon, known today as the surgeon general.

1871

John Maynard Woodworth, the first supervising surgeon, adopts a military model for his medical staff, assigning a cadre of uniformed physicians to machine hospitals.

1878

The Marine Hospital Service plays a thwarts the spread of global epidemic diseases like smallpox and yellow fever.

1889

Congress establishes the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps within the Marine Hospital Service.



1944

The *U.S. Public Health Service Act* broadens USPHS Commissioned Corps' scope and quadruples its numbers from 625 to nearly 3,000.

2008

DoD and the Department of Health and Human Services establish a partnership for psychological health, enabling joint-operations.

2020

The *Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act* establishes the U.S. Public Health Service Ready Reserve Corps.

**For contact:** [USPHSLegislativeAffairs@hhs.gov](mailto:USPHSLegislativeAffairs@hhs.gov)

command's chief of behavioral health for some ten thousand soldiers and many more family members was a USPHS captain, who performed superbly well in this vitally important role."

Following Phillips, a panel featuring retired Air Force Lt. Col. Susan Lukas and MOAA's director of government relations for health affairs Karen Ruedisueli (an Army spouse with more than ten years of advocacy experience in the military healthcare arena) discussed public health preparedness and the Military Healthcare System.

Lukas addressed ROA's vision for the USPHS RRC, particularly in a Title 10 role. "I envision the USPHS RRC having an even more expansive role in ensuring the Armed Forces' medical readiness," she said. "When it comes to education, training, and mission execution, the USPHS RRC must be integrated further into the Total Force."

June 13 was also significant for ROA's 2024 quarter three legislative intern (defense fellow), Peter Donlon, a student at American University with limited legislative experience.

"It was with a measure of trepidation that I discovered I would be helping to run the USPHS Advocacy Day," Peter said.

"In preparation, I studied ROA's legislative material and read up on the history of the Public Health Service. And then, the big day approached."

That Thursday began for Peter before the sun had fully risen. He dragged himself out of bed at the crack of dawn, the hazy remnants of sleep clinging to him as he navigated his way through the early morning traffic.



Peter Donlon poses for a picture in front of the Capitol dome on his first day with ROA.



His destination was the MMB, where the day's work awaited. The routine was familiar for Peter, a New Jersey native: it started with mini bagels.

Not just one or two, but two dozen, which needed to be sliced into quarters.

Cutting mini bagels is a revered tradition within ROA, a ritual that Peter inherited from legislative director Schwartzman, who in turn received it from his mentor, Susan Lukas.

After the initial bagel prep, the task list grew. Peter organized the assortment of food and beverages, set up tables, and arranged the legislative literature.

As the clock ticked closer to 0830, the room buzzed with anticipation. Peter's job, amidst bites of cheese, was to capture the moments with his camera. His high school Photo I class prepared him well for this task.

With the pictures taken and the morning's formalities completed, it was time to head to the Hill.

His team, comprising Wroblewski, Schwartzman, several USPHS officers, Ruedisueli, and himself, headed to the first meeting with the Senate HELP committee.

Peter was brimming with curiosity, though the workings of the legislative branch felt to him as enigmatic as magnetism itself.

But observing the USPHS officers' passion and dedication gave him confidence they were on the right track.



The first "wave" of food and beverage arrives outside the Minute Man ballroom on ROA director of administration Diane Markham's pushcart.



Peter Donlon's advocacy team poses for a picture following a productive meeting with the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions on ROA's June 13 Advocacy Day.

The first meeting was successful.

The HELP committee staff affirmed their support for USPHS' mission and encouraged further collaboration downrange.

After exchanging business cards and "snapping" a photo in front of the committee's office, the team left feeling even more optimistic about



what lay ahead.

The rest of the Advocacy Day followed a similar pattern for Peter's team. Although some offices showed more receptiveness than others, awareness about the USPHS RRC was nonetheless raised.

According to Peter, the highlight of his day arrived at the last meeting.

"After observing the team, Matt [Schwartzman] decided it was time for me to take the lead," said Peter.

With "nerves and sweaty palms," Peter presented ROA's requests clearly. He was sure he "overused 'um' about 200 times," but Schwartzman, the USPHS officers, and ROA's director of operations Trey Criner were there to support him and fill in the gaps (just as the USPHS and National Guard Bureau do for one another).

As the day wound down and the team made its way back to the MMB, Peter took a moment to reflect.

The day had been "enlightening" for him. He gained firsthand insight into ROA's advocacy process, understanding better its vital role in relentlessly representing reserve readiness.

At around 1630, all the teams completed their meetings. But Peter wasn't the only one to reflect on ROA's June 13 Advocacy Day. So too did many of the dedicated officers of the USPHS in attendance.



Pictured left to right (bottom): Cmdr. Alexander Amankawah, Cmdr. Yvonne Santiago, Cmdr. Zakiya Chambers, Lt. j.g. Jesse Samluk, Lt. j.g. Spencer Jones  
Pictured left to right (top): Cmdr. Michelle Barbosa, Cmdr. Barbosa Mason, Lt. j.g. James Lee, Lt. j.g. Lymand Feinman





# Feedback from the field

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I thought this day was amazing and impactful. I was proud to be a part of it.

★ *Cmdr. Barbosa Mason* ★



“Participating in the inaugural ROA USPHS Day was a day marked with many emotions. Preparing for the day with premeeting briefs, reading materials, and discussions provided great background for the day. I’m grateful for the time and energy put into the event to ensure we were successful. Arriving at the ROA building and hearing from ROA’s partners about how they were pushing for parity for our service was not something I knew much about ahead of this day. Throughout the day we met with staff on the Hill, many of whom still did not know who we were as a service. All staff seemed willing to want to help which ranged from ideas to make a change or openness to co-sponsoring a bill. The ability to have visibility for our service on the Hill will allow us to change from being America’s best-kept secret to being known as the public health leaders of our nation.”

★ *Cmdr. Michelle Barbosa* ★

“My thoughts on Advocacy are three-fold. First, this is something that is sorely needed for both the active and reserve components. Second, it is the start of a continuing conversation with congressional staff. Third, events like these need to happen more often for the USPHS since many people don’t know who we are. There is a definite need for us to be on the Hill. If we don’t engage with Congress, they’ll forget about who we are and what we need. It needs to happen often.”

★ *Lt. j.g. Jesse Samluk* ★

“Pride. That was my most felt emotion as I participated in the ROA USPHS Advocacy Day. This was unlike anything I have ever experienced. I was honored to be a part of a team of USPHS officers who love serving our country and took the time to grace Capitol Hill with our presence. With each congressional office drop-in, our words became clearer, our story more vivid, and our passion and enthusiasm more contagious. By the end of the day, I felt we had made a significant impact on the lives of those we encountered. Each person went back to their office knowing more about the USPHS, our capabilities, as well as the gaps in benefits and entitlements that hamper us from realizing our potential. We will continue to serve while educating Congress on the need to rectify certain issues.”

★ *Cmdr. Zakiya Chambers* ★



"I was really honored to walk down the hallways of the Capitol office buildings to advocate for our extremely important system. The staffers need to know and recognize our service from a distance. After the day was over, I felt a sense of accomplishment, even though it was hot and my legs were tired."

★ *Cmdr. Alexander Amankwah* ★

"Overall, I found the experience to be impactful and inspiring. The Advocacy Day was a well-organized and effective platform for us to present the USPHS' vital role. It was encouraging to see our collective voice making a tangible impact as we communicated our mission and needs to policymakers. The preparation and coordination were impressive, and it was clear that everyone involved was deeply committed to advancing our cause. Engaging directly with representatives and their staff allowed us to articulate the unique contributions of the USPHS and advocate for our continued support and recognition. After the day concluded, I felt a deep sense of pride and accomplishment. It was fulfilling to have the opportunity to contribute to such a meaningful cause and to see the enthusiasm and dedication of my fellow officers. I also felt a renewed sense of purpose and commitment to our work, knowing that we are making a difference through our advocacy efforts. The positive feedback and engagement from policymakers were encouraging and reinforced the importance of our continued efforts on the Hill."

★ *Lt. Cmdr. Briana Rider* ★

"I thought the Advocacy Day was really positive. The team composition was spot on, and we had the right number of asks to bring to each office. Some of our success will be determined by the effectiveness of our follow ups with each staffer. It was definitely a long day, but I was quite proud of those who organized this because we were set up for success."

★ *Lt. Cmdr. Stephen Browning* ★



"This was a well-organized event with thoughtful communications discipline. This event needs to be repeated, and frequently. Each reservist able to participate should become well-known to the congressional offices with which ROA and the Corps are developing relationships. It would be worthwhile to develop co-advocacy partnerships with the other uniformed services and include them in our advocacy efforts as well."

★ *Lt. j.g. Leighland Feinman* ★

"Attending the ROA USPHS Advocacy Day was an enlightening and confirmatory experience for me. Although this was my first time attending a legislative advocacy event on Capitol Hill, I felt that I was able to draw from my experience of attending state legislative days as a pharmacy student and working pharmacist when advocating on behalf of the pharmacy profession. The in-person day-of events were logically organized and implemented smoothly for those who attended. I appreciated the opportunity to meet with the offices of my entire congressional delegation (staffers for Senators Cornyn and Cruz and Congresswoman Fletcher). I am deeply appreciative of the planning and efforts of ROA and USPHS officers to coordinate and execute the first large scale ROA USPHS Advocacy Day. Through meeting with the largest number of members of Congress and their staff in one day, the USPHS Commissioned Corps, without a doubt, took a large step forward towards making a more externally visible impact."

★ *Lt. j.g. James Lee* ★

"The ROA USPHS Advocacy Day was a fantastic way to increase exposure on the Hill. This event was great for elected officials and staffers to learn about the USPHS Commissioned Corps, but also for our officers to get exposure to lawmaker's offices and to get an idea of how things work on the Hill. I felt like my team had great conversations with staff and also one of Maryland's elected officials, Senator Cardin."

★ *Lt. Cmdr. Kyle Knight* ★



“The Advocacy Day was a powerful and eye-opening experience for me. I felt a strong sense of purpose and recognition in support of the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps’ advocacy efforts. Being on the Hill provided a valuable platform for addressing concerns and pushing for necessary changes for my service. The Advocacy Day really reinforced our commitment and highlighted some crucial gaps in support for PHS officers.”

★ *Capt. Elvira Hall-Robinson* ★

“As a member of the USPHS’ legislative liaison team, the ROA Advocacy Day was an excellent opportunity to have members from our Ready Reserve Corps as well as experts with direct knowledge of our service operations have an opportunity to join our efforts to educate congressional offices about how they help protect the nation’s health. The Ready Reserve Corps is critical to the USPHS Commissioned Corps and provides additional expertise in public health fields that will help us achieve our mission during national emergencies. It is important we ensure they are extended benefits parity benefits as reserve members of the uniformed services. The Advocacy Day reinvigorated our team and helped provide perspective of the additional efforts we need to take as a service to ensure we are included in legislation that impacts servicemembers. I was proud to walk the halls of Congress and represent the USPHS with my colleagues. Our hope is that every time we walk those halls, congressional members and staff will say ‘those are U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps officers and they help protect our nation’s health and public health’.”

★ *Cmdr. Yvonne Santiago* ★

“The Advocacy Day was great! It was an honor to represent USPHS Commissioned Corps on the Hill. During our staff meetings, we learned what was of interest to members of Congress and committee staff. The USPHS Commissioned Corps needs the same legislative resources as our sister services. This will ensure we maintain funding and achieve the goals set out by our Senior Leadership.”

★ *Lt. Cmdr. Eric Butcher* ★



# ROA Advocacy Day aftermath

Advocates at ROA's Advocacy Day on June 13 focused on two key initiatives: restoring funding for the U.S. Public Health Service Ready Reserve Corps and supporting S.2297, the *Parity for Public Health Service Ready Reserve Act*.

At the time, S.2297 lacked a companion bill in the House of Representatives.

However, that has now changed.

During the Advocacy Day, USPHS lieutenant junior grade Jesse Samluk, who is now ROA's national judge advocate, met with the office of Congresswoman Lisa Blunt Rochester (DE) and urged support for a companion bill in the House.

On Friday, Sept. 27, the congresswoman responded positively, joining Rep. Greg Landsman (OH-01) in answering his call to action.

"The Parity for Public Health Service Ready Reserve Act would provide equal benefits and privileges to members of the Public Health Service Commissioned Corps—who currently lack the same benefits as other servicemembers," said Rep. Blunt Rochester in a news release announcing the bills introduction.

"It's time for us to finally do right by them, and I'm proud to help champion this important legislation."

While the introduction of this companion measure is a necessary and significant step forward, the job is not finished.

The last action Congress took before leaving Washington D.C. until after the election was to pass a Continuing Resolution to keep the government "funded" until Dec. 20.

While members may be absent from the Potomac area, staff are actively taking meetings on the Hill.

In the June edition of the *Reserve Voice Magazine*, Schwartzman wrote about ROA's legislative style.

"To relentlessly represent reserve readiness is - and will always be - ROA's legislative style," wrote Schwartzman.

Thus, ROA will continue to relentlessly represent readiness for the USPHS and seek out a legislative vehicle to attach funding and the *Parity for Public Health Service Ready Reserve Act*.

Without the support of HHS leadership, achieving this goal could prove unattainable.

Nonetheless, your ROA is fighting.

In many ways, we are just getting started. 





# Power through partnership

On Aug. 1, ROA interviewed National Guard Bureau and U.S. Public Health Service representatives to discuss their joint efforts in securing medical readiness.



# The uniformed services of the United States are facing unprecedented challenges.



U.S. Army Arizona National Guard State Surgeon, Colonel Tom Leeper receives the first round of the Moderna vaccine in the state of Arizona Dec. 21, 2020 at Papago Park Military Reservation, Phoenix. (U.S. Army National Guard Photo by Spc. Thurman Snyder)

But as history has shown, national unity in the face of adversity is essential to accomplish a mission.

One example of the military embodying this spirit is the partnership between the National Guard Bureau and U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps.

On Aug. 1, ROA held an exclusive interview with National Guard and USPHS representatives to spotlight the growing relationship between these two organizations.

“When we work together, it’s not just one and one equals two, its one and one equals three,” said Army Col. Tom Leeper, chief, medical operations, National Guard Bureau Joint Surgeon’s Office.

“It’s great because there’s a lot of common ground there. Even though we have different functions, we don’t really have a duplication of service. We really complement each other, and we have a synergistic effect.”

The National Guard and USPHS Commissioned Corps play critical roles in ensuring the health, wellbeing, and medical readiness of the Total Force and the nation.

In the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the National Guard lacked the manpower and capability needed to execute its missions, according to Colonel Leeper.

Similarly, the USPHS Commissioned Corps lacked the recognition and state-level contacts to deploy efficiently outside the federal space, according to the services’ first ever full-time legislative liaison, Lt. Cmdr. Zakiya Chambers.

The National Guard’s state level contacts and the USPHS Commissioned Corps’ medical specialization complemented each other well.

By training and deploying together through official memorandums, both services overcame these challenges and created conditions for a partnership that is more than the sum of its parts.



USPHS Cmdr. Ingrid St. Amand, a former Maryland National Guardsman, addressed this in detail:

“The Army has the principle, fight like you train and train like you fight. So that’s what this partnership sets out to do: to make sure that we’re preparing for the deployments prior to, understanding each other’s capabilities, and understanding each other’s languages as well,” said Commander St. Amand.

“It’s a perfect fit when you have two organizations that have aligned missions. Like Colonel Leeper mentioned, we help to fill each other’s gaps where needed.”

In addition to increasing readiness in the COVID-19 pandemic, through the Remote Area Medical and Innovative Readiness Training programs, the National Guard and USPHS have honed their skills and provided no cost healthcare to in-need communities.

They have also successfully jointly deployed on multiple occasions in response to natural disasters, a growing mission set for the National Guard in particular.

While the National Guard and USPHS Commissioned Corps have managed to overcome systemic cultural and legal challenges through building their partnership, budgetary ones remain.



Official headshot of USPHS Cmdr. Ingrid St. Amand.



U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Rebekah Sherwood, 2024 Guam Wellness Innovative Readiness Training mission medical officer in charge, conducts a vision test with a patient at a pop-up medical clinic in Mangilao, Guam, Aug. 5, 2024. The mission, a collaborative effort between the Guam Department of Public Health and Social Services, and Air Force active duty, Air Force Reserve, Navy and Guam Air National Guard personnel, enabled the treatment of more than 1,500 patients from the island. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Elora J. McCutcheon)

“As the only uniformed service without an operations and maintenance budget, the USPHS Commissioned Corps has been hampered” said Lieutenant Commander Chambers. “But we’ve been very creative in working with the National Guard Bureau, and other partners, to mitigate issues and turn challenges into opportunities.”

ROA is fighting on Capitol Hill to provide the National Guard and USPHS Commissioned Corps with the tools needed to grow their partnership and sustain the Total Force’s medical readiness.

This includes restoring rescinded funding for the USPHS Ready Reserve Corps, advancing legislation that provides benefits parity between the uniformed services, and delivering no-cost medical and dental care to all members of the Selected Reserve.



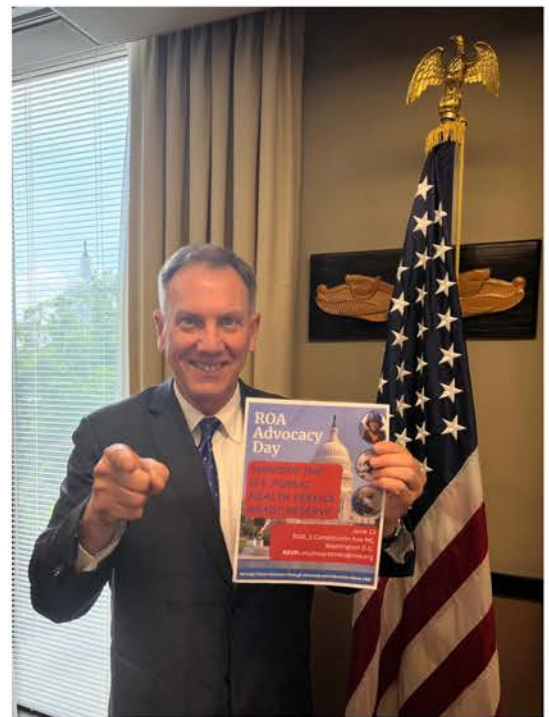
While the need for ROA's advocacy remains, this partnership has proven its capability and potential in the face of adversity.

ROA envisions this partnership serving as a model to better prepare the nation for future public health emergencies and support the military in large scale combat operations.

Aug. 1 was also the official retirement date of the twenty-ninth Chief, National Guard Bureau, Gen. Daniel Hokanson.

ROA's legislation and military policy director Matthew Schwartzman started the interview with a tribute to the general and his distinguished military career.

"On behalf of ROA, thank you General Hokanson for your more than 30 years of service in the National Guard," said Schwartzman. "You have been a steadfast champion for the cause of National Guard readiness, and the care and wellbeing of those that serve and their families. ROA wishes you the best of luck in this next chapter."



ROA's executive director, retired Army major general Jeff Phillips, spotlights the Association's June 13 Advocacy Day focused on the U.S. Public Health Service Ready Reserve Corps.



Air Force Gen. Charles Q. Brown Jr., Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, hosts the retirement ceremony for Army Gen. Daniel Hokanson, the 29th Chief of the National Guard Bureau, Joint Base Myer Henderson Hall, Arlington, Virginia, Aug. 1, 2024. Hokanson retires after 38 years of service in the U.S. Army and National Guard. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. 1st Class Zach Sheely)

Representing the National Guard Bureau was Army National Guard Col. Tom Leeper.

Representing the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps was Cmdr. Ingrid St. Amand and Lt. Cmdr. Zakiya Chambers.

The USPHS Commissioned Corps leadership thanks ROA for their time and attention in highlighting this important partnership.



<https://www.youtube.com/@ReserveOrganization>

# Watch the ROA exclusive interview



Scan the QR code with your mobile device to watch ROA's exclusive interview with the National Guard Bureau and U.S. Public Health Service.

