



# ROA UP TO THE MINUTE MAN UPDATE



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To the members of our Minute Man Movement:

It's my pleasure to provide you with this edition of the *ROA Up to the Minute Man Update*.

ROA national has been *relentlessly representing readiness* here in Washington D.C.

However, before giving you the "play by play," I must first tell you about the amazing vacation I had in Iceland this past week.

If you have not yet been to Iceland, I recommend you change your travel plans immediately.

I arrived in Reykjavik, Iceland's capital, at 0600 GMT on Easter Monday.

My first goal was to acquire a warm base layer, which I did at an Icelandic franchise called Icewear. Thankfully, Icewear was one of the few stores open on Easter Monday. It was there (and throughout the week) that I learned about the insulating capability of merino wool.

After two days of exploring downtown Reykjavik and the attractions of the nearby surrounding area (including a geothermal spa), my travels took me six hours southwest to the largest glacier in Europe: Vatnajokull.

After putting micro spikes and crampons on my hiking boots, I explored one of the glacier's ice caves and traversed its many crevasses until I reached its approximately 7,000 foot high peak.



Before conquering Vatnajokull, I visited many of Iceland's signature waterfalls, towns, and landscapes, including:

- The "heart of Iceland": Thingvellir National Park
- Gullfoss
- Skogafoss
- Seljalandsfoss
- Gljufrabui
- Vik
- Reynisfjara black sand beach
- Diamond beach



It was at the country's first Alþingi (parliament) located at Thingvellir where I took a moment out of my personal time to bring you a video *Up to the Minute Man Update*.

All that said, the best part of the trip was chasing (and catching) the northern lights.

I tend to speak in superlatives; however, when I tell you that seeing the northern lights was life changing, know that I am not exaggerating for the effect.

For those who have this on their bucket list, here's some helpful tips:

- Travel to a safe area that has limited (or no) light pollution.
- Dress warmly and pay attention to cloud coverage and weather conditions.
- Allow eight to ten minutes for your eyes to adjust to the darkness.
- Take plenty of pictures! Just a few of the ones I took are below.



Rest assured, ROA, as great as this trip was, I'm thrilled to be back at it in D.C. Moreover, what preceded this trip was a steadfast commitment to the following advocacy campaigns that yielded many victories:

## ***We're fighting to save the U.S. Public Health Service Ready Reserve Corps!***

On March 14, executive director Jeff Phillips submitted a statement for the record to the Senate committee on finance regarding ROA's views on sustaining the USPHS RRC.

"The USPHS RRC program, endorsed by 12 former and acting Surgeons General, is part of a substantial modernization effort to enhance USPHS' capabilities and support the medical readiness of its uniformed services counterparts," **wrote Phillips**. "As such, ROA urges your support for rapidly replenishing the response capabilities of the USPHS Commissioned Corps and Total Force medical corps by restoring the USPHS RRC program with \$28 million in funding for FY 2025 and codifying S.2297, the *Parity for Public Health Service Ready Reserve Act*, in public law."

ROA has been a steady champion of the USPHS RRC program since its establishment via SEC. 3214 of the *CARES Act* in 2020. However, the *CARES Act* failed to provide the RRC with a codified structure and access to the proper "tools" for recruiting and retaining qualified talent.

About one year ago, ROA co-hosted an education forum at the Minute Man Memorial Building with the Commissioned Officers Association on various proposals aiming to provide the USPHS with the tools it needs to recruit and retain qualified talent for its RRC, including:

- Providing RRC officers with dual compensation and leave parity.
- Expanding TRICARE coverage to serving and retired RRC officers.
- Ensuring RRC officers can access the Post 9/11 GI Bill and Montgomery GI Bill Selected Reserve.

The event ultimately resulted in the introduction of S.2297: the most significant benefits parity bill for the USPHS RRC in its young history.

However, the debt ceiling agreement reached in June stripped the USPHS RRC of its funding beginning in 2025.

ROA's fight to replenish the response capabilities of the USPHS RRC is well underway. I'm currently coordinating a day of advocacy with mission partners that I wish for as many members of our Minute Man Movement to be a part of.

I will keep you informed of this effort as more details become available.

However, in the meantime, I ask you to be on the lookout for more updates regarding ROA's intention to have a day of advocacy solely focused on this leading line of effort, reinforced by ROA Resolution 23-02: *Enact the Parity for U.S. Public Health Service Ready Reserve Act*.

## ***We testified before Congress on improving military to civilian transitions for reserve component members and their families!***

It was my honor to represent you at a March 20 hearing before the House veterans affairs economic opportunity subcommittee on pending legislation and improving military to civilian transitions for reserve component members and their families.

Read more about the hearing by visiting <https://myfox8.com/business/press-releases/einpresswire/698599609/roa-urges-congress-to-drive-forward-with-needed-reforms-to-improve-military-to-civilian-transitions/>.

The legislation subject to this hearing was compelling and reflects the good intentions and subject matter expertise of committed congressional members and committee staff.

At the hearing, I thanked the subcommittee's chairman for the opportunity to testify, reaffirmed our support for legislation that requires all courses under the MGIB-SR to be charged at the in-state tuition rate, and detailed our Delivering Reservist Integration and Veterans Education plan (also known as the DRIVE plan).

ROA's DRIVE plan, if adopted by Congress, will reshape TAP in favor of reserve component members and their families by:

- Amending TAP's eligibility requirements to allow service members who accumulate 180 cumulative days of active service, which includes drill weekends and active duty for training, to participate.
- Providing reserve component members that take TAP multiple times with diminishing returns the opportunity to opt out of their TAP requirements (with thoughtful consideration given to the timing of such a request).
- Adding reserve component focused matters to the TAP pre-separation checklist and process, including information, advice, and counsel on using separation from service documentation to receive retirement benefits.
- Establishing a reserve component curriculum track within TAP.
- Ensuring military spouses are fully integrated in their service spouse's TAP process.

Scheduled for April 17 at 1300 EST, the subcommittee will hold a markup as a follow on to the March 20 hearing.

For those unfamiliar, a legislative markup is a critical step in the policy process, as congressional committees further shape legislation following feedback from industry stakeholders at hearings and closed-door meetings.

While not guaranteed, legislation that passes a markup has a higher percentage of passing at least one chamber of Congress.

I am proud to report that the subcommittee accepted many of ROA's recommendations to improve its TAP legislation (named the *ETS Act*), including:

- "Dropping" a provision that would have barred the provision of DD Form 214's if mandatory TAP requirements were not met.
- Establishing a reserve component curriculum track within TAP.
- Allowing reserve component members to waive their mandatory TAP requirements pending no changes in the TAP curriculum.

While ROA is pleased with the improvements made to the bill and thanks the subcommittee for the bandwidth it has committed to TAP, ROA believes a more holistic approach is still required. For example, the amended bill does not address systemic access challenges for Reserve and National Guard service members that did not serve at least 180 consecutive days on active duty.

This is in part because TAP falls under the armed services committee's jurisdiction.

When asked by the subcommittee's Ranking Member Mike Levin (CA-49) at the hearing if ROA would support shifting this jurisdiction to the veterans affairs committee, I replied that we would "So long as that was in accordance with the Constitution, so long as that was in accordance with the standing rules and parliamentary procedure of the House, and so long as that would lead to a more expedient passage of the proposals." I also reaffirmed for the

record our commitment to working “with anyone.”

This “jurisdictional question mark” could impact the future of this campaign. Whether it will be for the better remains unclear.

Regardless, ROA will continue to fight for the remaining parts of its DRIVE Plan until Congress drives forward with reserve component focused reforms to TAP.

### ***We provided our 2024 veterans priorities to the House and Senate!***

On March 29, executive director Phillips submitted ROA’s statement on veterans’ policy priorities for 2024 in association with the Veterans Service Organization joint hearings.

ROA thanked House and Senate veterans affairs committee chairmen Mike Bost and Jon Tester for the opportunity to submit this statement and invitation to provide (in person) witness testimony before a joint hearing in 2025.

Most of the statement focuses on priorities that relate to the care and wellbeing of veterans of reserve component service and their families and caregivers.

While ROA’s primary commitment is to ensure a strong and ready reserve force, there is a strong relationship between caring for veterans and their families, institutional integrity, and recruiting and retention.

Phillips’ 2024 statement before the House and Senate veterans affairs committees reaffirms ROA’s commitment to our nation’s veterans and outlines common sense solutions to issues only impacting the reserve component community.

“Caring for veterans is simply part of the cost of having a military and waging war. It is not an afterthought to be indulged in when budgetarily convenient,” wrote Phillips.

### ***We secured the introduction of affordable healthcare legislation for federal employees and dual-status technicians!***

Yesterday, ROA’s support for the Servicemember Healthcare Freedom Act was cited in a congressional news release (<https://kim.house.gov/media/press-releases/congressman-kim-introduces-bipartisan-bill-to-improve-military-health-benefits>) by the bill’s sponsors: Reps. Andy Kim and Jen Kiggans and Senator Richard Blumenthal.

This legislation allows members of the Selected Reserve whose civilian employer is the federal government and dual status technicians to enroll in TRICARE Reserve Select as opposed to the more costly (insert name of plan).

“It is unacceptable that more than one hundred thousand Reserve and National Guard service members and dual-status technicians must pay over 100 percent more for their healthcare until 2030,” said executive director Phillips. “ROA thanks Representatives Andy Kim and Jen Kiggans and Senator Richard Blumenthal for sponsoring the Servicemember Healthcare Freedom Act, which reduces out-of-pocket expenses and provides continuity of care for reserve component members and dual-status technicians to ensure readiness and improve retention now.”

You may recall that ROA was active in expanding TRS coverage to these patriots by securing the codification of SEC. 701 of the FY 2020 NDAA. However, that provision doesn’t “kick in” until 2030, which is why ROA has remained committed to eliminating this congressionally created “probation period.”

ROA has joined forces with the National Defense Committee/Enlisted Guard and Reserve Task Force to build a broader coalition of support around this campaign.

In a joint letter signed by executive director Phillips and the NDC/EGRTF's senior fellow Kevin Hollinger, ROA thanked Reps. Kim and Kiggans and Sen. Blumenthal for their sponsorship of the Servicemember Healthcare Freedom Act and provided a cost-comparison of the competing health plans (TRS and the Federal Employment Health Benefits Program):

“Considering both plans, the yearly minimum out-of-pocket expense for the FEHBP standard option is \$2,122.56 for the member only and \$4,881.84 for the family plans. For TRS, this decreases to \$623.40 for the member only and \$3,082.44 for the family plans,” **wrote Phillips and Hollinger.** “In other words, self-only enrollees in FEHBP are paying (at a minimum) 109 percent more for their health insurance than member only TRS enrollees. Families are paying (at a minimum) 45 percent more.”

ROAs fight for this legislation is just beginning. Expect a Call to Action in the near future focused on this particular line of effort.

### ***We secured an appropriations hearing for the reserve chiefs!***

As you likely know, the president recently submitted his budget request for FY 2025 to Congress.

The submission of the budget request triggers a (mostly) repetitive congressional consideration process that begins with a series of hearings from principal representatives of the federal government's departments and agencies.

This includes testimony from the chiefs of the reserve components on their budget needs. Due to the strains of a compressed congressional schedule, for the first time since at least the 112th Congress, the House appropriations subcommittee on defense did not host a hearing last session on the president's FY 2025 funding request for the Reserve and National Guard with testimony from each of the RC chiefs.

When ROA “got wind” that this might be a repeating occurrence on March 3, executive director Phillips wrote the subcommittee's chair and ranking member the very next day urging support for resuming the holding of such a hearing.

“ROA requests your support for resuming the holding of an annual hearing on a review of the president's annual funding request for the Reserve and National Guard with the reserve component chiefs beginning in FY 2025,” **wrote Phillips.**

“In addition to ensuring the reserve components can execute the mission, and their service members are well cared for, the annual budget also contains funding for programs supporting the nearly one million Reserve and National Guard family members,” **Phillips continued.**

Both sides of the aisle wrote back to ROA reaffirming their support for reserve component budget needs, including fully funding the National Guard and Reserve Equipment Account, and agreeing to consider the request.

While it has not yet been officially posted on the committee schedule, ROA has received confirmation from various reputable sources that a hearing on the RCs FY 2025 budget request will be held on April 30.

We are currently awaiting official confirmation from the House appropriations defense

subcommittee regarding the intel ROA has received and will keep you informed on any future updates.

***We were present for the unveiling of the House armed services quality of life panel recommendations!***

You may recall from last month's *Up to the Minute Man Update* that ROA joined forces with the Air Force Sergeants Association to form a joint legislative agenda focused on reserve component member and family quality of life.

In yet another sign of solidarity, ROA and AFSA attended the April 11 House armed services QoL panel's press conference where its robust recommendations for the FY 2025 NDAA were unveiled. ROA is reviewing the recommendations now and will respond accordingly.

Thank you for reading this (lengthy) edition of the ROA *Up to the Minute Man Update*.

Before concluding, I ask you to join me in thanking our defense fellow (Jake Fales) for his invaluable contributions to ROA's advocacy over these last few months.

His last day with ROA will be on Friday, April 19. Jake's commitment to our mission amid a rigorous academic and extracurricular schedule was nothing short of impressive.

During his time with ROA, Jake drafted various modes of congressional correspondence, was the lead advocate for ROA supported legislation, and helped ensure the execution of our day-to-day legislative operations.

Jake was also the principal architect of ROA's written tribute to Rear Adm. Robert "Bob" Merrilees, published Dec. 22 (<https://www.roa.org/blogpost/1650035/496683/In-memorial-Rear-Adm-Robert-Bob-Merrilees>).

We wish Jake the best of luck (although I can tell you firsthand he doesn't need it) as he moves forward to other professional growth and development opportunities in the government affairs arena!

Thank you again, Jake - for everything!

Respectfully,



Matthew L. Schwartzman  
Director, Legislation and Military Policy

P.S. I have been invited to speak at the MilMoneyCon in Denver, Colorado, on April 27 at 1300 MT as part of a panel with fellow advocates from the National Military Family Association and Military Officers Association of America.

As part of the panel, I will be pulling back the curtain on how Congress decides military benefits and explain the importance of getting involved at all levels of the advocacy process.