Opinion
NCR Voices



National Guard troops walk on Columbus Circle plaza in front of Union Station in Washington, D.C., on Aug. 25, 2025. (NCR photo/James V. Grimaldi)



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I was on the Metro traveling into Washington recently to attend a Multifaith Vigil of Prayer at Columbia Heights that sought divine help to both take back the city and to protect immigrants.

Given the topic and President Donald Trump's latest performative excess — his attempted takeover of D.C. — I stewed on the train, prepared to let the anger and disgust flow freely. Changing trains at Gallery Place, I saw one of the National Guard soldiers, a young Black man, part of Trump's deployment, leaning against a wall talking with one of the regular Metro Transit Police.

I could feel new fuel stoking the anger.

Being directionally challenged, I also wanted to make sure I was getting the correct train and needed to ask for help. I headed toward the Metro police.

Then, something clicked to change my attitude. Maybe it was the soldier's casual demeanor. Maybe it was the realization that he was just there, no imminent danger in sight, an unfortunate pawn on someone else's big chessboard. I decided that I'd use the need to ask directions to maybe say something. Not angry. Not disgusted.

When I got there, I simply said hello, asked directions to the next train, and before being escorted to my destination by the most helpful Metro police, I said to the soldier, "I know you are just obeying orders. But I want you to know I am sad that you've been placed in this position."

He smiled, nodded several times, and said, "Thank you."



National Guard troops walk through Union Station in Washington, D.C., on Aug. 25, 2025. (NCR photo/James V. Grimaldi)

The next day I had to pick someone up at Union Station, so I went early to get a look at what was going on there following the lunatic speech by White House Deputy Chief of Staff Stephen Miller a few days earlier in the Shake Shack hamburger outlet in the marble-clad lobby of the station. For the record, I am neither a "stupid white hippie," nor "over 90." I certainly am not "a communist."

I also don't want to do anything to advance Miller's juvenile hatred and rage.

I ended up talking to six more National Guard troops, two pairs walking around and around the inside of Union Station, and a pair outside near their big, tan military vehicle. In each case, I said the same thing — I understood they were only following orders, but I wanted to say that I was sad they were placed in this position. This day, however, I added a line: "I hope you are not ordered to do something we all would end up regretting." And I told them, as I did the first, that I hope they stay safe.

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We are all in this together. The soldiers are fellow citizens. A majority of those I encountered were people of color. This is not what they were trained to do. They are being used as props in the Trump/Miller follies. They are not being deployed to stop crime. As one resident of a high crime area in the city told The New York Times, "If Trump is genuinely concerned about the safety of D.C. residents, I would see National Guard in my neighborhood. I'm not seeing it, and I don't expect to see it. I don't think Trump is bringing in the National Guard to protect Black babies in Southeast." The Wall Street Journal found a similar sentiment.

The performative art only works where there is a guaranteed audience, places like Union Station, around the Capitol and near the White House, outside of busy night spots. I can envision troops showing up on postcards: "Greetings From the Nation's Occupied Capital!"

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I don't know if my encounters with the National Guard add up to anything more than a distraction in what appears to be a very boring assignment for citizen soldiers. The order to carry arms had not yet taken effect. If the smiles, the nods and the thank yous are any indication, they appreciated being spoken to as fellow citizens. What I saw in those faces were ordinary folks, perhaps husbands, fathers, very likely people with jobs and careers outside their National Guard service.

We need to do what we can to counter the inane noise of the likes of Trump and Miller: protests, signs, certainly voting. The show of prayer in the public square was a powerful witness. Divine help in pushing back against the lies and racism of this administration would be welcome.

And then maybe, occasionally, a quiet, understanding conversation with other citizens who happen to wear military uniforms. They should know our thoughts. We're all in this together. The need to understand each other will only become greater as the threat from the Oval Office increases.

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