



## **NGAUS 101**

# **WHAT HAS NGAUS DONE FOR YOU LATELY?**

The question “What has NGAUS done for me lately?” is commonly heard by association representatives during the annual membership drive. However, the more appropriate question is “What have *our* associations done for me lately?” because it is the combined efforts of the individual state associations, NGAUS, EANGUS, AGAUS, and others that result in legislative action to enhance both unit readiness and quality-of-life for our personnel and their families.

When asked this question, my answer is “Just about everything!”

The National Guard Association of the United States (NGAUS) began in 1878, when a group of volunteer officers, veterans of the Civil War from both the North and South, gathered in Richmond, VA to discuss “matters of practical reform which would make the Militia a more effective instrumentality in our system of National Defense.”

The officers’ military experiences had demonstrated the importance of a trained Militia, and they in turn sought changes that would again make the Militia a key element in America’s defense. Out of their informal meeting grew an organization they called the “Association of Officers.”

The group met again, this time in St. Louis, MO where they renamed their organization the “National Guard Association.” Today, the two major reasons for establishing the organization remain relatively the same: to promote national security and to improve and maintain a strong Army and Air National Guard of the United States as the nation’s first line of defense as part of the Total Force.

In 1944, the first permanent headquarters of the Association was established in a two-room suite in Washington, DC. During the next 15 years the Association was relocated several times as its responsibilities and full-time staff grew. In 1959 the Association moved to its present location, The National Guard Memorial, located at 1 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., just a few blocks from our nation’s Capitol and Congress.

Some members of the National Guard are under the mistaken impression that the Department of Defense (DOD) *automatically* provides the equipment, resources, and policies necessary to ensure a robust and ready National Guard. However, although the flow of funding and policies comes from the DOD to the National Guard Bureau (NGB), then states and individual units, it is questionable just how much of those resources would be identified for the Guard without direction from Congress.

The United States Constitution establishes the basis for the Militia, now referred to as the National Guard, on several key provisions. First, Section 8 – Powers of Congress – establishes that Congress shall have the Power to... “provide for the common defense”, “to raise and support Armies”, “to provide for calling forth the Militia to execute the Laws of the Union, suppress Insurrections and repel Invasions”, and “to provide for organizing, arming, and disciplining the Militia, and for governing such Part of them as may be employed in the Service of the United States, reserving to the States respectively, the Appointment of the Officers, and the Authority of training the Militia according to the discipline prescribed by Congress.” And the Second Amendment – the Right to Bear Arms – states that “A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a Free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.”

These very important provisions of the United States Constitution clearly place responsibility for ensuring National Guard readiness directly in the hands of Congress, not the Department of Defense. Congress exercises this responsibility by legislating “authorizations” and “appropriations” that provide funding and policies specifically for ensuring that the National Guard is “organized and armed.”

The National Guard Bureau provides annual defense budget inputs to the Department of Defense. However, due to budget “caps”, the Department is often faced with tough choices that could result in under-funding many National Guard (and active duty) programs.

Additionally, since National Guard Bureau personnel are on Title 10 orders, they are duty-bound to support the President’s DOD budget. Additionally, National Guard Bureau legislative liaison (NGB/LL) personnel are not authorized to “lobby”, although they are permitted to “inform” Congress.

The National Guard Association of the United States (NGAUS) is a private organization that “is” permitted to lobby Congress on behalf of its 45,000 members. The National Guard Memorial (NGAUS Headquarters) serves as a perfect location to facilitate lobby efforts by NGAUS and state association delegations.

The National Guard Memorial is an impressive building with well-appointed meeting areas, state of the art audio/visual equipment, a library, museum, and the ability to host a variety of receptions or social events for the purpose of establishing a dialog with Congress to discuss National Guard priorities.

So, back to the question “What have our associations done for me lately?”...

Each year in its *National Guard* magazine (April edition in 2006), NGAUS publishes an article entitled “What Has NGAUS Done for You” that highlights our association’s legislative successes and accomplishments on behalf of the National Guard. These successes are the result of a team effort, with NGAUS coordinating the efforts of the National Guard Bureau, states, and industry.

Just a few examples of these successes include:

- In 1916 the National Defense Act guaranteed the states Militia status as the Army’s primary reserve force and mandated the use of the term “National Guard.” That same year annual drills were increased from 24 to 48 and annual training from 5 to 15 days.
- In 1948, Public Law 810 provided Guardsmen their first comprehensive retirement benefits, established death and disability benefits, and the associations beat back a proposal to fold the Army Guard into the Army Reserve.
- In 1950, Congress approved the first armory construction bill that provided federal funds amounting to 75 percent of the cost of new armories (states acquire the land and pay 25 percent of construction costs).
- Title III of Public Law 810 established medical care to retired Guardsmen and their family members in 1950, and Public Law 881 increased benefits for survivors of deceased Guardsmen.
- In the 1960s, Public Law 86-632 clarified re-employment rights and job protection for Guardsmen performing an initial period of active duty for training up to six months; our associations were able to neutralize efforts to reduce Army Guard end-strength and eliminate four combat divisions, resulting in Congress maintaining overall Army Guard end-strength at 400,000 troops. The associations were also able to defeat a DOD proposal to cut Guard and Reserve pay tables to 75 percent of the active-component rate.
- During the 70s and 80s, Association efforts resulted in bolstering Guard benefits to improve recruiting and retention, expanded exchange privileges, improved group life insurance, and established space-available travel...just to name a few. The late 70s also saw the Air National Guard receiving its first new C-130 transports as a result of congressional “adds.”
- In 1983, the Defense Appropriations Act, for the first time, provided dedicated funding for the procurement of miscellaneous equipment in support of Army Guard support units.
- In 1985, Public Law 98-525 provided temporary G.I. Bill funding to any Guardsman working toward a baccalaureate degree or equivalent and our associations persuaded Congress to make the Montgomery G.I. Bill permanent in 1987.

- Throughout the 90s, as the military was drawing down following the Cold War, NGAUS defeated several attempts to reduce National Guard force structure, and attempts by the executive branch to cut the military technician force under its “reinventing government” initiative.
- During the late 90’s and into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, many of NGAUS’ efforts were directed at congressional “adds” for equipment, full-time manning, military construction and force sustainment. Retirement points for inactive duty were increased from 75 to 90, special pay, bonuses and benefits, including VA home loans were established, and Montgomery G.I. benefits and commissary privileges were enhanced.
- Finally, during the FY2007 legislative season, the efforts of our associations resulted in the reinstatement of the Army National Guard end-strength of 350,000 soldiers. And, after a 7-year campaign, all Guardsmen were granted better access to TRICARE at an affordable rate and lawmakers also lowered the basic housing allowance threshold from 140 days to 30 days for members of the Guard.

This is just a sample of what our associations have accomplished on behalf of our members and their families. There is much more. The real value of what our associations have done for us is the coordinated effort to ensure Congress is fully informed of the readiness status of the National Guard and what resources and policies are needed to achieve desired readiness levels.

The National Guard Association of the United States will lead the way to ensure the Guard message is told. However, it is the responsibility of each of us to support the associations that provide our voice in Congress. Be a member, know the issues, visit the NGAUS web site often, read the *National Guard* magazine, and participate in the political process...because Congress is our direct link to readiness and success.

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