



WHAT HAS NGAUS and MTNGA DONE FOR YOU LATELY?

The question “What has NGAUS done for me lately?” is commonly heard 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 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, the 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.**

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.

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. **At the state level, the MTNGA is a private organization permitted to lobby the Montana Legislature on behalf of all our Montana National Guard members, regardless of rank. MTNGA works hand in hand with the Enlisted Association of Montana on our common legislative efforts.**

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

Just a few examples of NGAUS successes that directly benefit you include:

- 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” that NGAUS advocated.

- In 1985, **our associations persuaded Congress to make the Montgomery G.I. Bill permanent in 1987.**
- Throughout the 90s, **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 21st 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.**
- In 2007, 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.**
- In 2008 we successfully encouraged Congress to pass the National Guard Empowerment Act, which among other things **elevated the Chief of the NGB to the rank of 4-stars** and put the National Guard on equal footing with other service/MAJCOM chiefs. The NGB finally has a seat at the table when top level decisions are made.

These successes are the result of a team effort, with NGAUS coordinating the efforts of the National Guard Bureau, state associations (including the MTNGA), and industry.

In Montana, the MTNGA has a lobbyist working on your behalf at the state legislature. **Past successes for Montana National Guard members here at home include:**

- ✓ Establishing the first ever Montana College Scholarship Program which has put over \$1 million into the hands of our national guard members to pay for tuition.
- ✓ Hunting/fishing license price breaks for those on active duty (deployed)
- ✓ Protecting your SSN and privacy data previously available to anyone accessing public records
- ✓ Established permanent funding for the Montana Veteran’s Home with a set apportionment of state tobacco taxes.
- ✓ Established the first ever National Guard veteran’s public employment preference system, which places MT National Guard veterans on equal footing with active duty veterans when seeking government sector jobs.

Our current Montana initiatives will continue to focus on getting state income tax breaks for your military pay (not just when on Title 10 active duty), enhancing college tuition provisions for our guard members, and getting more protections & pay equity when called up on State Active Duty, free car license registration/plates, enhance the hunting/fishing licenses to be free for all members regardless of Title 10/32 status, and family relief funding to name just a few.

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.

A final note from the MTNGA Board of Directors:

We can’t do this work on your behalf without your support. For those of you that have supported your associations in the past, please accept our heartfelt gratitude. For those that have not been members up to now, or had let your memberships lapse in the past, please come on board today...we need you now! Learn more and read what some of your fellow officers have written in the NGAUS conference section of the MTNGA web site at www.mtna.org.