

President's Message

As I close out my term as your President, let me share some of my thoughts with you on a few topics of mutual interest.

On the national-level, this has been a year of both successes and challenges for our Army and Air Guard. There is no question the National Guard is as relevant today as ever. From combat operations in the Middle East to hurricane relief in the south, we have proven ourselves under some of the most trying conditions in recent memory.

From a local perspective, I'm pleased to report that the health of the National Guard Association of Nebraska (NGA-NE) is also as strong as ever. Let me hit a few of the highlights for you.

We started the membership year with our Annual Spring Conference, which was well-attended. At the conference I outlined my goals for the year, including the following:

- Maintain 100% membership
- Host a successful and memorable AGAUS Conference in Omaha
- Take steps to ensure the long-term financial health of the NGA-NE
- Provide strong NGA-NE support for legislative activities of interest to our membership
- Be well-represented at the NGAUS National Convention

Working with our unit commanders, we did indeed achieve 100% membership last year. I thank all of you who supported this effort. Membership provides the core strength of our organization and the challenge to maintain 100% membership is an ongoing effort. I ask each of you to stay active in the quest to sustain this achievement. If you're not yet a Life Member, consider it. If you know an Officer or Warrant Officer who is not yet a member, talk to them about the value of adding their voice to ours.

The AGAUS Conference in Omaha was an unqualified success. The event was truly amazing and The Adjutants General were able to conduct very important business at a critical time. You will remember that the BRAC list came out the week prior to the conference. Many of you volunteered to support this great event and are to be congratulated for your efforts. You represented our organization and the Nebraska National Guard very well.

As many of you know, the NGA-NE provided some of the financial resources required to host the AGAUS Conference. As a result of hosting a successful conference and taking some risk up front, the NGA-NE realized a substantial financial benefit. This has placed the NGA-NE on firm financial footing; maybe the best in the history of our organization. Having a solid financial outlook will help us work towards two goals we discussed at the 2005 Spring Conference; achieving long-term financial stability and becoming more active with legislative activities.

On the legislative front, our top targets at the state-level remain securing a guaranteed 100% tuition assistance for National Guard members and exemption of military retirement income from state income taxes. During the past year, several NGA-NE members testified in support of state legislation related to these priorities. In February, LTC Jim Murphy and I testified before

the Revenue Committee on LB945 and LB992. Both of these Bills would exempt some or all of military retirement from state income taxes. We highlighted the potential recruiting and retention benefits of the proposed legislation to the Committee. Although neither Bill made it out of Committee this year, we will continue to support legislation like this that has a positive impact on the past, current and future members of the Nebraska National Guard and their families. Your voice is just as important as the Association's. When you see legislation that will positively impact the National Guard, contact your state and federal elected representatives and let them know how you feel.

Although we had a small group of NGA-NE attendees at the National Guard Association of the U.S. (NGAUS) National Conference in Hawaii, we did get some good business done out there. Remaining engaged at the national level may be more important now than ever before. The recently proposed end strength cuts to the Army and Air National Guard should help bring home this point to each of us. The NGAUS is our voice in Washington, and rarely in my memory has having a strong NGAUS been so important to the future of the National Guard.

Just prior to the NGAUS National Conference, Hurricanes Katrina and Rita hit the gulf coast. At the Conference we learned of a fund-raising effort by the State National Guard Associations in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. The effort was focused on making financial resources available from State Associations to help National Guard members and their families who were directly impacted by the hurricanes. The NGA-NE was happy to join many other State Associations around the country in supporting our fellow National Guard members in need. We donated a total of \$5,000 to the National Guard Associations of these three states to help them help their members.

Even though the NGA-NE is in good shape overall, there are still challenges ahead of us as an organization. Let me preview for you what I see as a few of the key issues that the NGA-NE leadership and membership need to address and that we will discuss at the upcoming Spring Conference.

- The Board of Governors (BOG) will recommend a change to the NGA-NE Constitution and By Laws that would make the terms of the NGA-NE Officers two years (vice one). In addition, the BOG is discussing going to bi-monthly meetings, which would be at the discretion of the President. We feel both changes will enhance the continuity of NGA-NE leadership and provide the opportunity for our leadership to make decisions, put them into action and see the results.
- A BOG sub-committee has been formed to evaluate investment options for current NGA-NE assets. We feel this process is crucial to sustaining the NGA-NE's financial health well into the future. We need to select a course of action and put it into practice in 2006.
- We must stay engaged on the legislative front. Several bills of high interest to our past, present and future National Guard members are working their way through the legislative process on both the national and state levels. We must refine our targets and prosecute them vigorously. The elections this year will give us a unique opportunity to do just that and to ensure the issues important to our members receive the appropriate attention.

- The insurance program is going through some changes. As you all know, SGLI has increased to the point where the old Militia Insurance Trust plans we sponsor are not seeing much new business. While some solid new policies are being offered, their financial impact on the NGA-NE is different than we've been used to in the past. We can no longer count on a continuing stream of insurance commissions each year, as most new policies sold pay only a one-time commission to the NGA-NE. The insurance program is a benefit we offer to our current and retired soldiers and airmen. As such, we need to push for products that are relevant in today's combat environment. Expect to hear about some new ideas at the Spring Conference.

- The NGA-NE has also been active in supporting a wide variety of events and functions. We have provided financial support to unit demobilizations, Army and Air Military Balls, Gold Bar events, the Memorial Hall Dedication Ceremony and others. While all of these are worthwhile events to support, the increasing number of requests we are receiving has forced us to work on a defined policy on how we accept and evaluate requests for financial support. A set annual budget is also a must in this area.

We will continue to work on these things during the remainder of my term and your new NGA-NE leadership will be looking for your support as we continue the process.

As I finish out my term as your President, I would like to thank a few people who make this association successful. Suffice it to say that this year has been one of the busiest ever for our Officers and BOG members. I thank President-elect MAJ Ken Boatman and the BOG members for their advice and support. They are your voice in NGA-NE decisions and meeting attendance has been on the rise all year. The Executive Director really handles our day-to-day business and CW4 John Regan and LTC Jim Murphy have done a great job for us this year. Lt Col Daryl Bohac and 1Lt Nancy Curtis have handled our financial accounting and transactions very well. It's the dedication and hard work of folks like these who make my job as the President pretty simple.

Let me leave you with this thought ... if there was ever a time to be active in the NGA-NE and NGAUS, the time is now. Despite our busy operations tempo and the high quality of our people and their work around the world, BRAC and budget cuts have targeted the National Guard as never before. We continue to struggle to receive the federal and state benefits we have earned with the sacrifices of our soldiers, airmen and their families. Joining together as one strong voice gives us our best chance to overcome these challenges to sustain the National Guard as a relevant fighting force for the future.

I thank you for the opportunity to serve as your President. MAJ Ken Boatman will soon take the reins of the NGA-NE and I encourage you to give him the same level of support, commitment and encouragement that you have given me. Please consider joining us at the Annual NGA-NE Golf Tournament on Friday, 28 April 06 and at the Spring Conference in Lincoln on Saturday, 29 April 06. We hope to make both events fun and memorable for all attendees.

Col Rick Evans