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## "D.C. in '76"

I recently described our 97th General Conference, on this page, as one of the best and most productive our Association has held in recent years. I attributed its overall excellence to the appearance of many senior leaders of the active military establishment as speakers, to the solid substance and straight-from-the-shoulder candor of their presentations, and most certainly to the magnificent support provided by our hosts of the Washington National Guard.

At the same time, in a letter to state adjutants general and NGA presidents, I asked for the views of Guard officers who attended. Are our general conferences the significant and memorable occasions we want them to be? Do we offer adequate up-dates of national defense issues through the speakers we attract? Are we providing an effective forum for airing the Guard's own concerns and problems? Do we provide opportunity for informal, one-to-one exchanges of views between Guardsmen? Is military airlift a critical attendance factor?

To date, I have received 43 replies, reflecting views from 35 states. Without exception, they are thoughtful and constructive, reflecting the careful consideration and time that went into their preparation. They will assist substantially in planning future conferences.

Almost without exception, the replies pointed out that, for most delegates and their spouses, the NGAUS conference must serve as their vacation for the year. Moreover, that attendance represents a personal outlay of \$500 to \$1,500 per couple, depending on travel distance. For that reason, it was urged that we leave most afternoons open for individuals and couples to see the city in which the conference is being held, and noteworthy sites in its vicinity. Several suggested a return to the four-day conference, with all afternoons open for personal activities.

Many suggested such variations as choosing conference sites on a regional basis, permitting small states which never can host a conference alone to join in helping a neighboring state.

While most of the replies endorsed the view that the program and speakers at Seattle '75 were outstanding, there were some dissenting voices. Several pointed out that too many speeches in a row become monotonous and, as the hours pass, impossible to absorb. Some said that our conferences have tended to become stereotyped.

Next summer, at the height of the bicentennial observance, we will conduct our 98th General Conference in Washington, D.C. We are working some of the ideas received from the states into plans for "D.C. in '76." For example, we are going to avoid scheduling official activities for every minute of every day, leaving more time for optional tours, individual relaxation, and state-generated social events. We will encourage attendance by the teenage offspring of the delegates, and are preparing an array of optional activities for them.

We'll stage a spectacular bicentennial-related Heritage Encampment right at the foot of the Washington Monument, and produce a special pageant and ceremony at that site for conference attendees Sunday afternoon, Aug. 29, preceding the Monday opening of our conference. Another event in which all may participate as couples, or families, will be tours of the newly-opened National Guard Heritage Gallery, an exhibit of historically important militia/National Guard artifacts and exhibits which is being established on the entire first floor of the National Guard Memorial building.

In addition, "D.C. in '76" also will demonstrate the regional concept proposed in some of the replies I received. It is being staged with the joint sponsorship and assistance of the National Guard of three entities — the District of Columbia, Maryland and Virginia — augmented by the NGB Wives Club and the NGAUS staff.

We hope to make the 98th General Conference an unforgettable experience for all who attend. We'll soon start distributing detailed information to the states to assist Guard families in planning.

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The spirit of the militia was dramatically captured in this centennial painting by Archibald M. Willard. The Spirit of '76 lives on in today's National Guard as it did in the Militia of 1776.

—(Courtesy  
Hemingway Galleries)

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