President's Message

The summer months are both the end and the beginning of the grass roots cycle wherein the NGUSA spends much of its time, resources and energy. As we contemplate the 100th NGUSA General Conference that will convene September 28 in Portland, Oregon, we should remember just how much of a grass roots organization the NGUSA really is. Under the guidance of other associations that maintain headquarters in the national capital, we make no secret of our conviction that our grass roots connection is our strongest suit. It is the single most important factor in making our legislative program successful. And that legislative program is our most important effort, as it has been for 108 years. When the NGUSA was formed in 1878, the goal was "united representation before Congress" and that goal has remained a constant down through the years.

The arrival of summer means that the Congress is well-along in the process of enacting the authorization and appropriations bills that provide the Department of Defense money for the next fiscal year. This year, we are contemplating a two-year budget process for DoD. That means the work we do between now and Congress' recess this fall is doubly important because it will establish our spending parameters for both FY88 and FY89.

The authorizing and appropriating process has many parts. Thus, as we send ACTION GRAINS to our members, we hope you will keep in mind that what you may be reading at this time may bear a resemblance to one that came a month before it, it probably addresses a slightly different step in the legislative process. When considering the DoD authorization, subcommittees act first, then full committees act. Then there is debate in the full Senate and House of Representatives. Then there is a House-Senate Conference Committee to resolve differences. The cycle repeats itself to produce a Defense appropriations bill.

Achieving the National Guard's requirements (whether proposed by DoD or initiated by your Association) is important in the context of these bills depends on . . . grass roots support. A major effort of our full-time staff in Washington is to organize and energize Guard officers in the states who must in turn inform and motivate their congressmen. This is the key to the reputation of the NGUSA as an effective entity on Capitol Hill.

The executive director and his staff are highly effective at pulling together all of the (to use an old G-2 term) EEs—the essential elements of information—needed to support the effort. But more often than not, what "makes it" or "breaks it" in Congress is a letter or telephone call from a hometown member of the Guard to the senator or representative. There is simply no way to overstate the importance of a personal contact from a Congress member's home district.

Three years ago, when the NGUSA was promoting enactment of the New GI Bill, we headed into a key battle with the information that the House Armed Services Committee was deadlocked on the question. A congressman not particularly known as an enthusiastic supporter of the Guard (or very many things military) appeared to be the swing vote. A call from the NGUSA to the congressman's home state identified a battle commander without any claim to political connections. He listened to the problem and said, "I'll try it." His subsequent telephone call was taken by a staffer who was sufficiently intrigued that several more calls were made to include a conversation with the congressman. The bottom line is that the congressman not only voted with us—carrying the day for the New GI Bill—but he even made an impassioned speech on behalf of the proposal and what it would do for the young people in his district. And he has since supported the National Guard in other issues of significance.

Grass roots support at the local, state, and national level is important at the outset of the NGUSA legislative process. Let us set a reminder that July 1 is the deadline for states to submit resolutions to the NGUSA headquarters for consideration this September in Portland. Those out in the states who want to influence the direction of these efforts in legislation, as well as other matters, should take this review process seriously.

There is a quality versus quantity aspect to resolutions that ought to be kept in mind, too. The Resolutions Committee that will convene in Portland on September 27 will assess both. In terms of quality, we hope that individuals and states address issues that are in some way achievable, either short-range or long-range. Many of these resolutions will be in support of various planning initiatives, such as those from the Air Guard or ground equipment to the Army Guard. Those are areas where action can be in various ways, at least in most cases.

We need to curtail resolutions that promote unrealistic goals or unrealizable proposals. There are many low-level "personal" issues that mean a lot to those who might benefit from passage, but hanging in at the light of day, it is clear that of possible merits, the prospects for success are not high. So we have got to wake up and realize that some of the goals are achievable and others are not. The position of NGUSA is that of putting the emphasis on achieving goals as we promote the year's resolutions.

Providing united representation before Congress on the Legislation Plan brings us back to the summit year from now. Permit me a final word of advice: The NGUSA has found that when we present a Grand Community with a clear, simple, and usually true, when possible. Remaining unresolved issues are then priorities and we have no rationale to be in Congress by tying up the floor.