The Legislative Process for NGAUS Starts at the “Grass Roots” Long Before the Staff Hits the Street

When the NGAUS Executive Council met in Washington several weeks ago to weigh Guard-related issues and establish legislative objectives, two aspects of its work were worthy of note. One was the depth and breadth of issues with which they dealt, ranging from such weighty matters as SALT II and revitalization of Selective Service, across the spectrum to such mundane but important bread-and-butter topics as recruiting incentives and potentially harmful Guard/Reserve pay proposals. The other was the degree to which council members had made themselves familiar with the concerns and views of their “constituents” in the remote outer reaches of the Guard structure.

At the recent meeting, the Council performed an annual check of identifying Guard-related issues, establishing NGAUS positions compatible with the Guard’s assigned Conference resolutions, and transforming non-specific policy declarations into firm legislative objectives for 1979. Then, in a final act, it determined the year’s legislative priorities.

The meeting was only the last step in a process that commenced many months ago, when the numerous Guard Associations held their annual conferences. It is at those sessions that the concerns and ideas of young company and battalion level officers come to surface to be reflected in policy resolutions sent to NGAUS for national consideration.

A 103-member Resolutions Committee, representing the ARNG and ANG of every state, submitted them to scrutiny during the 103th General Conference in St. Louis, then sent them to the conference floor for a delinquent vote by delegates representing Guard forces of every state. Those that survived became NGAUS policy statements.

In another phase of the decision-making process, NGAUS professional staff researched a broad array of major Guard programs. All of it is in the 1979 NGAUS RED BOOK, which was recently distributed to 2,000 commanders.

This year, the system produced a set of legislative objectives and priorities that made clear the major concern of Guard leaders at every level. It is personnel—manpower, woman-power, people to fill the empty holes in almost every unit. Guard and Reserve units are scores of thousands of people short of the numbers needed. A mobilization be ordered. There are not enough trained people in the long-ignored IRR (Individual Ready Reserve) to fill up the empty ranks on M-Day and replace anticipated combat casualties. Selective Service is virtually defunct.

Should an emergency arise and a mobilization be ordered before the morning situation is improved, many Guard and Reserve units will find that overnight, they have become the IRR!

Therefore, priority objectives of NGAUS will include such legislative initiatives as:

• Revitalization of Selective Service, to include registration and classification of U.S. youth as a draft, plus authority to draft for the IRR if other means fail.

• Direct of such obvious disinterest as elimination of paid military leave for Federal employees, commanders’ administrative pay, and uniform allowances.

• Adoption of a 24x enlistment (two years in a drilling unit, four in the IRR) if an ongoing Active Army test shows it to be feasible.

Also high on the NGAUS priority list, the Council declared, will be a continued effort to obtain modern new aircraft for both ANG and ARNG flying units. Add-on procurement of new fighters and tactical transports has been authorized on several Guard units, but only for the ANG as a result of NGAUS efforts. Now the Guard will be expanded to seek modern attack helicopters for ARNG aviation units.

Another high priority goal will be amendments to the law to guarantee credit for 20-year (Title II) retirement for both officers and enlisted Guardsmen in the title-credit care system. Title-credit care is under Title 22. This will enhance the attractiveness of the slots that are to be filled by full-time Guard personnel this year.

Other priority targets for 1979 will include restoration of construction funding to levels that will help reduce the backlog of construction needs, and indemnification of Guardsmen against liability.

Those are our priority objectives for 1979. Now the task becomes one of convincing Congress and the Administration that the resources and policies we seek are indeed essential—indeed vital—and are not merely “nice to have”.

They illustrate better than anything else what NGAUS is all about. Each of them, if attained, will contribute directly and importantly to the Guard’s ability to train effectively, mobilize and deploy rapidly in an emergency, and fight proficiently if necessary.

What all this adds up to the Guard’s primary goal—readiness!