A collision course with the Congress, the institution charged by the Constitution with raising and supporting armies.

It is clear that an appreciation of the capabilities, commitment and professionalism of today's National Guard is consistent with in only a few of the Army's senior leaders and that the almost institutional mindset of the Militia as amateurs can only be changed by positive initiatives at the highest levels of the Army.

Reports from our commanders returning from Desert Storm tell us that our units faced an institutional bias upon arrival in theater and had to demonstrate their professionalism to be accepted fully as members of the team. Fortunately, this was accomplished in spades prior to the end of hostilities as we supported one of the most successful military operations in history.

The relationship between the Air Force and the Air Guard is not universally smooth, nor can it be. But the tensions and suspicions don't exist and there is no question that the Air Guard is accepted as a full partner by Gen Merrill A. McPeak, chief of staff, on down to the armament plant flight line. General McPeak's experience with the Air Guard is firsthand. During the time he was Pacific Air Forces (PACAF) commander, his hermit and flight line at the Hawaii Air National Guard crew room at Hickham AFB, and he flew with the Guard on a regular basis.

A fast-track leader in our Army has a string of assignments and schools that seldom provides any exposure to the Guard and Reserve. This career path, which is very common in the potential to make four stars, allows no time to become acquainted with what is one-half of our Army: the Guard and Reserve. This is the only way the Guard and Reserve is based on what he has heard others say and upon military parades that have been with us since the beginning of history. Or it may be based on some reservist he saw at an armory in 1968 who needed a haircut.

Our future theater commanders, chief (CINC's) don't get the opportunity to serve as Guard and Reserve advisers, or in readiness groups too often, as RTOC instructors. Congress recognizes this shortcoming, but their solution is the assignment of regulars to command our battalions and brigades. Neither is this an answer.

The answer, as we see it, is for the Army's best and brightest, the future CINCs, to have an assignment readiness groups, as advisers, CONUS Army headquarters where we will regularly be required to meet with the Guard and Reserve at the battalion, brigade and division level.

We also need to make a conscious effort to promote interface and mutual respect. Those who have worked with Guard engineers and medics in South and Central America have seen how the Guard can accomplish, not once, to contrast the Air Force.

The Air Force is assigning company grade pilots to each Air Guard fighter squad, and they are dual-licensed and ready to take the unit's strength. There are full time for all assignments given to them. As the active Reserve Force draws down in size, it is protecting the investment it has made in its pilots by giving many of them a three-year tour with the Air Guard. They will return to the Air Force with a strong understanding of what the Air Guard is all about.

We have a long way to go to forge the kind of team that we want the National Guard to be. But certainly a good place to start is to have a seat at the table when the future of the National Guard is crafted.

As GEN Gordon R. Sullivan, in his new position as chief of staff of the National Guard, we are sure he is as interested as we in repairing the breach and bringing the National Guard up to par. On a rotational basis National Guard units would set up a CSM-modified program to address their maintenance backlog. This concept for individual and personal training has met with great success.