



# ANNUAL POSTURE STATEMENT OF THE 54

January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025

## **Introduction**

The Adjutant Generals (TAGs) of the 54 states, territories, and District of Columbia are honored and privileged to represent and command the ready militia envisioned by our Founding Fathers and established by the *Militia Act of 1903*. We are the National Guard – *Always Ready-Always There!*

State governors appoint TAGs as the senior military officers responsible for commanding, controlling, and supervising all National Guard units within the 54. They report directly to the governor on state matters, the Secretary of Defense, and the Secretary of the Army or Air Force on federal missions.

Every day, citizens representing “*We the People*” serve in the National Guard of our sovereign states as citizen Soldiers and Airmen. They are ready and committed to deterring, fighting, and winning our Nation’s wars as the combat reserve with three federalized core missions: 1) fighting America’s wars, 2) securing the homeland, and 3) building enduring relationships with allied and partner nations. Concurrently, the National Guard serves a dual-status role as a community-based force in response to state emergencies, such as natural disasters, civil unrest, and other crises.

This annual posture statement outlines the National Guard’s enduring principles and collective challenges and provides the Adjutant’s Generals most critical priorities.

## **National Guard Enduring Principles**

TAGs advocate and operate under three enduring principles that guide their roles in safeguarding the security, well-being, and readiness of their Soldiers and Airmen. The following three “*immovable rocks*” preserve the constitutional intent of the National Guard.

*First*, the National Guard is resourced and designed to serve primarily as the combat reserve of the Army and Air Force and as vital support during *in extremis* circumstances when civilian resources are overwhelmed by disasters or emergencies. This construct preserves its traditional role and ensures availability for domestic missions, such as disaster response, civil support, and humanitarian assistance.

Historically, the National Guard's primary responsibility was to train and prepare for federal warfighting missions. It serves as a strategic reserve for the Army and Air Force. Operational deployments were uncommon, and domestic operations were usually short and carried out under State Active Duty (SAD).

However, the National Guard's operational tempo has changed significantly since 9/11. The National Guard's involvement in the Global War on Terror demonstrated its resilience and essential capabilities. The Army National Guard (ARNG) and Air National Guard (ANG) rapidly mobilized and deployed as operational forces, actively and routinely participating in missions worldwide. For example, during the Global War on Terrorism, a total of 366,410 Army National Guard Soldiers and 51,500 ARNG ANG Airmen deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan between September 2001 and September 2015. Of those totals, approximately 99,000 ARNG and 44,000 ANG servicemembers deployed more than once. The number of ARNG deployments during that period represented approximately 20.3% of all Army deployments; the number of ANG deployments represented approximately 10.7% of all Air Force deployments.

Furthermore, the National Guard's quick and effective response to Hurricane Katrina encouraged the routine use of the National Guard for domestic missions in Full-Time National Guard Duty (FTNGD) status rather than State Active Duty. Initially focused on natural disasters, using FTNGD expanded to include other disaster/emergency missions (COVID, the Southwest border, and civil disturbances), emerging and persistent missions (cyber and wildland firefighting), and missions that see the National Guard serving as more of a general-purpose labor pool (substitute teaching, school bus driving, and hospital and state agency labor backfills) than *in extremis* responders when civilian resources are overwhelmed by disasters or emergencies. As the domestic mission grew in tempo and importance, so did the tension with the primary combat reserve mission.

*Second*, unit-based activation ensures unit integrity, remains the most effective and efficient use of the National Guard, and best aligns with constitutional intent. While the Constitution does not explicitly prescribe how the National Guard should be organized or deployed (unit-based or individual-based), the historical context and structure of the constitutional militia signify a system based on units or local formations. Since 9/11, the Guard has deployed individuals or small groups by cross-leveling in the Army National Guard and reserve component periods (RCP) in the Air National Guard. The shift from unit-based deployments in the National Guard has negatively impacted unit cohesion, readiness, morale, retention, and the Guard's traditional identity as a community-based force. These changes threaten the Guard's operational effectiveness and long-term sustainability.

*Third*, state governor equities regarding the National Guard must be respected and protected to preserve state authority, ensure local responsiveness, and maintain the constitutional balance between state and federal powers. The U.S. Constitution divides military powers between the federal government and the states, a concept outlined in the Militia Clause of Article 1, Section 8.

Various statutes should protect National Guard equities. For example, Governor authority was codified under the 10<sup>th</sup> Amendment, whereby powers not explicitly given to the federal

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government are reserved for the states. Under Title 32, Section 104, the units within the National Guard may "*not be relocated or withdrawn without the consent of the state's governor.*" In addition, Title 10 of the U.S. Code, Section 18238, states, "*No change in the branch, organization or allotment of a unit located entirely within a state may be made without the approval of its governor.*"

Nevertheless, in recent years, policies and legislative proposals have aimed to diminish Governor equities. Title 32 USC, Section 502(a)(8), for example, risks federal government overreach by potentially withholding federal funds or officer federal recognition for non-compliance with National Guard Bureau policy. More recently, in March 2024, the Secretary of the Air Force authorized Legislative Proposal (LP) 480 to transfer all space missions (units and airmen) of the Air National Guard to the United States Space Force. Significantly, this legislative proposal states that such transfer shall occur *without the governor's consent*, disregarding the statute. Such legislation threatens the existence of the National Guard by allowing the Active Component to take assets, missions, and people from the National Guard at their discretion and without dialogue. LP 480 diverges from a long-standing federal-state relationship. It circumvents and ignores the Council of Governors, established by federal executive order and federal law to ensure governors have a method "*to advise the Secretary of Defense on matters related to the National Guard.*"

Federal entities continue to challenge the National Guard's enduring principles. As the senior military leaders of their states and territories, TAGs must remain vigilant against the erosion of these "*immovable rocks*" to secure the constitutional militia construct envisioned by our founding fathers and protect National Guard Soldiers and Airmen.

### **Our Collective Challenge**

The United States can only achieve its National Defense Strategy with the manpower, specialized skills, and operational flexibility of its combat reserve. The National Guard has reliably deployed, served, and sacrificed along with our Active Component in every major U.S. conflict, from World War II to recent operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. For example, a National Guard Brigade Combat Team recently deployed to Germany to train Ukrainian soldiers and units.

Moreover, the Air National Guard provides almost half of the Air Force's tactical airlift support, combat communications functions, aeromedical evacuations, and aerial refueling and is responsible for air defense throughout the United States. Additionally, the more than 325,000 Soldiers of the Army National Guard are a fully sustainable and interoperable force that remains firmly committed to providing trained and equipped units capable of carrying out full-spectrum operations to protect America at home and overseas.

As a vital part of the U.S. Total Force military, the National Guard aims to strengthen Joint Force integration and strategic readiness. Given the threat of great power competition, threats to our homeland, and imminent natural disasters, the National Guard must be fully modernized, equipped, and trained concurrently and proportionally to fulfill its role as the Army and Air Force combat reserve. National Guard talent and expertise have been critical to our Nation's readiness and security.

For instance, the Air National Guard has been delivering essential space capabilities for the past 28 years, both at home and abroad. Concurrent and proportional recapitalization also includes keeping all 25 existing Air Guard fighter squadrons crucial for meeting global demands and deterring adversaries. A 2024 RAND study showed that reserve component aircraft cost less to operate and support, and assigning F-35 aircraft to the reserve component could save hundreds of millions in training costs while retaining experienced pilots for the war fight. Alarming, many ANG flying squadrons have legacy aircraft with no recapitalization plan. For example, sixteen (16) fighter squadrons, fourteen (14) refueling squadrons, three (3) C-130H squadrons, and twelve (12) MQ-9 squadrons have no recapitalization plans. The Air National Guard is also seeing significant reductions (50 percent) in Control and Reporting Centers.

Soldiers and Airmen are the National Guard's most valuable resource and key to our operational readiness and capability. To ensure the readiness of our Guard members, we must pursue parity with the Active Component for benefits and medical service. DOD must streamline and consolidate Reserve Component duty statuses with benefits parity with the Active Component in compliance with the FY 2018 NDAA. Likewise, full-time manning support in the National Guard needs to be fixed. The National Guard is funded for only 55 to 65 percent of full-time manning support and mission requirements, the lowest of any Service component.

Medical readiness is essential for all Soldiers and Airmen. However, many Guardsmen are not medically ready for activation due to a lack of medical insurance coverage and access to healthcare facilities when not in duty status. Guardsmen deserve and require equal access to medical care as their Active Component counterparts to be combat-ready.

Recapitalization and modernization are essential for the National Guard to maintain our service members' readiness, effectiveness, lethality, and survivability. Our Guardsmen deserve and require the resources, funding, and equipment to remain fully integrated with the Active Component when activated. TAG's focus on preserving the National Guard constitutional militia construct and taking care of Airmen and Soldiers defines and drives the priorities of the 54.

On 4 October 2024, the Secretary of Defense released a memorandum titled "Total Force Optimization for Strategic Competition." In that memorandum, he directed that Service Secretaries and "other DoD Component heads" "identify, develop, modernize, and implement policies" that align with the principles in this document. As the 54, the second of three components of the Total Force, we request and urge you to use our Adjutants' General input into this landmark opportunity to shape and modernize Total Force policy. Not since 2007 has this policy been changed, and with this new era we are entering, we consider our input critical.

### **TAG Priorities:**

1. **Duty Status Reform:** The DOD must streamline and consolidate Reserve Component duty statuses with benefits parity with the Active Component in compliance with FY 2018 NDAA. The current Duty Status Reform initiative reduces reserve component duty statuses from 29 to 9, which improves warfighting readiness with a consistent, coherent, and efficient means to employ National Guard members. It also ensures National Guard service members

receive equitable benefits as Title 10 Reserve Components for the same missions performed. Our priority is to protect the benefits Reserve Component service members receive, retain state National Guard authorities, and retain state abilities to rapidly deploy National Guard personnel in response to domestic emergencies.

2. **Medical Readiness:** All National Guard Members should have access to uninterrupted low-cost healthcare, primarily due to the expanding scope of National Guard missions and activations. Consistent, dependable, and predictable healthcare access during duty status changes directly impacts readiness, retention, permeability, and morale. Healthcare accessibility is expressly needed in rural and underserved areas. The optimization of TRICARE enrollment and eligibility verification process to ensure and prevent loss of coverage is imperative to proper Soldier and Airmen care. Utilizing an automated interface between AROWS, DEERS, and Military Electronic Health Records during suspension and reenrollment processes to the previously held Tricare plan will increase overall medical readiness and reduce enrollment issues. There are additional benefits to providing healthcare to the National Guard. Namely, it encourages small business employers to hire National Guard members and is a recruiting and retention incentive.
3. **Full-Time Manning Modernization:** Develop a multi-year full-time manning ramp to significantly increase funding for the state's full-time manning requirements, update salary rates, and reenlistment bonus authorization for federal technicians. As mentioned, the National Guard is funded at 55 to 65 percent of full-time manning and mission requirements today. This has adverse long-term effects. Moreover, language in DoDI 1304.31 prohibiting dual-status technicians from receiving service reenlistment bonuses must be removed. Additionally, language from ANG Instructions that prohibit Air Guard Reserves from receiving service reenlistment bonuses currently offered to the Active Component must be removed. Lastly, the Office of Personnel Management's special salary rate tables for parity with the civilian/corporate sector should be updated.
4. **Recapitalization of National Guard Mission & Equipment (Concurrent and Proportional):** The National Guard must be fully modernized, integrated, and resourced to fulfill its role as the Army and Air Force combat reserve. The Air National Guard is 40 percent less expensive than its Active-Duty counterpart and has twice the experience. Procurement priorities for the Air National Guard are 25 fighter squadrons, C130J and KC-46 aircraft, and HH-60W helicopters. The Army National Guard procurement priorities include UH-60M Black Hawk Helicopters, MQ-1C Gray Eagle Extended Range Unmanned Aircraft, and Tactical Wheeled Vehicle Fleet.
5. **Preserve the National Guard Constitutional Militia Construct:** Uphold the constitutional intent of state sovereignty codified in the United States Code. State governor equities regarding the National Guard must be respected and protected to preserve state authority, ensure local responsiveness, and maintain the constitutional balance between state and federal powers.

## Conclusion

Our nation can only deter, fight, or win our nation's battles with the National Guard. Our

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message is that there is room to improve how Congress and the Department of Defense build and sustain National Guard readiness and effectiveness, which are critical to achieving our National Defense Strategy. Our guardsmen are the citizen Soldiers and Airmen dedicated to serving, fighting, and sacrificing to preserve the United States of America. Despite our demonstrated performance and proven relevance in serving at home and abroad, policies that erode the National Guard constitutional militia construct and potentially threaten stability, capability, and readiness continue to surface. Military leaders and Congress must recognize the importance of modernizing the National Guard parallel and proportional to the Active Component to ensure we can meet operational timelines. Specifically, National Guard relevance, lethality, and readiness depend on receiving proportional and modernized equipment, medical access, and benefits equal to their Active Component counterparts. With the right resources, equipment, and weapon systems, the National Guard will be “*Always Ready, Always There*”.