



The National Guard Association of Kansas

P.O. Box 19031
Topeka, KS 66619-0031

Conference Attendees,

Over the past year or so increased discussion has taken place regarding how NGAUS accounts for membership for each state. It is quite likely that this issue will come to a vote at this year's General Conference. This is a very important discussion and you should be aware of its implications. First of all, I'll explain how membership is presently accounted for.

There are essentially two types of memberships available to current and retired National Guardsmen. For an annual membership, current and retired members pay a fee annually to remain members of the association. The lifetime membership can be purchased at any time and from that point on secures the Guardsman's membership until death.

Any particular state's membership totals are expressed in terms of a percentage where the numerator is the total number of members and the denominator is the total number of current officers. Currently all states are allowed to count ALL life members in the numerator as long as that membership was purchased while the member was active. The only memberships that do not count toward the numerator are retired life memberships.

This construct allows states to show 100% (or greater) membership despite the fact that all current officers may not be members. Some states don't believe this is an accurate representation and feel that once a member retires, despite the fact that they have purchased a "life" membership, their membership should not count toward a state's totals. Their proposed change to the by-laws is that the numerator includes only the memberships of *current* officers.

This proposal will likely receive support from two groups of states; those with a very low number of life memberships and a high number of annual memberships and those with an overall very low membership. Under this proposed change, their numbers would be relatively unchanged. However, for most states with a good mix of annual and life memberships, the change could be devastating in terms of membership numbers. In Kansas, for instance, we currently show 104% membership. Under the proposed change, where we would only be allowed to count *current* officers' memberships, we would be at 80%.

There are multiple reasons I feel this proposed change would be bad not just for individual states, but for the association as a whole.

- Disenfranchisement of retirees- Our association exists to promote the welfare of both current guardsmen and retirees alike. The message of this proposal is that retirees don't count. To make our retirees invisible and not count their membership toward our overall numbers is a recipe for failure. Our retirees are our sole members with relatively unrestricted bounds as far as what they can say and to whom.

- Devaluation of lifetime memberships- Thousands of national guardsmen have made the commitment of purchasing a lifetime membership. Their action demonstrates a devotion to the association and its principles. This proposal discourages lifetime memberships.
- Large negative change in national membership numbers- Currently, NGAUS shows 61% membership. This change could initially drop that percentage to as low as 50%. This is not the message we want to send to our elected officials. Efforts to raise membership to current level could take years.
- Encourages an “arms race” mentality- With many states experiencing a drastic negative change in membership, the demand to reach 100% will likely cause undesirable culture changes. Undue pressure and coercion may be fostered at the unit level. States may feel compelled to spend corporate sponsorship dollars on “buying memberships” rather than using those funds to make legislative visits, provide training and orientation to members and in general further the goals of the association.
- Sets an unattainable goal- Without unit, state association, or corporate “augmentation” 100% membership is all but impossible. Setting a goal that is unattainable is a disincentive and would likely result in apathy and decreased membership.

While it is true that the current formula results in a small amount of fuzzy math, the alternatives are worse. At the end of the day, the numbers that matter are; the number of officers we have and the number of members. The present system accounts for both, rewards the loyalty of those committed to a lifetime membership and recognizes that we are also here for our retirees and decidedly value their membership and participation.

Perhaps the time is right to review our membership goals, policies and purposes, but that should be part of a larger conversation that takes into account the long term fiscal and legislative goals of our organization. I highly encourage you to consider the destructive effects of this proposal and make your opinion known to NGAUS leadership and the membership at large.

//SIGNED//

Col Chris Stratmann

President

National Guard Association of Kansas