VIKANG NEWS

Fall 2026



National Guard Association of Minnesota wins the **Greatest Increase in Life Membership Award** at the 2026 NGAUS Conference in Indianapolis!

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President's Letter

Maggie Gregg



Association Members *-As President of the National Guard Association of Minnesota (NGAMN), I'm proud of the work our association continues to do to support Minnesota's Soldiers, Airmen, retirees, and their families. Our mission is simple but important: ensure our Minnesota National Guard has the resources, benefits, equipment, and support needed to accomplish its missions at home and abroad.*

One of our biggest accomplishments this year was receiving national recognition at the 148th NGAUS General Conference & Exhibition in Indianapolis for the highest growth in lifetime membership over the past year! This achievement belongs to our entire team. Growing our membership strengthens our collective voice and reinforces the importance of having an engaged, informed association advocating for our Guard community. Thank you to everyone who helped make this possible. Let's keep that momentum going!

Membership is more than a number. The National Guard Association of Minnesota connects our members with opportunities to advocate for meaningful change, access member benefits, support educational scholarships, and engage with leaders who influence the future of our force. Through our annual state conference, professional development opportunities, legislative engagement, and regular association meetings, we continue building relationships that make our organization stronger.

Our work in Minnesota is closely connected to the priorities of the National Guard Association of the United States (NGAUS), which represents our interests on Capitol Hill. NGAUS's current federal priorities focus on ensuring the Guard remains ready, relevant, and equipped for the missions of tomorrow. Key initiatives include duty status reform to simplify the complicated system governing Guard service, modernization of the military technician program, GI Bill parity, and improved benefits for retirees. NGAUS is also advocating for stronger cyber capabilities, counter-drone systems, and critical equipment modernization.

For the Army National Guard, that means advocating for modernized aviation, artillery, air defense, and tactical vehicles. For the Air National Guard, priorities include fighter recapitalization, mobility aircraft modernization, and improved training and mission- support infrastructure. These investments directly affect our readiness and our ability to answer the nation's call.

These priorities matter because our members deserve the tools, training, and benefits necessary to serve effectively without sacrificing the support they and their families have earned. A strong National Guard requires more than dedicated people; it requires sustained investment and a unified voice in Washington.

As we look ahead, NGAMN will continue working alongside NGAUS, our state leadership, and our members to advocate for these priorities while strengthening our association at home. I encourage every eligible member to get involved, share our mission with fellow Soldiers and Airmen, and consider how membership can make a difference.

Thank you for your continued commitment to our association and to the Minnesota National Guard. Our recent national recognition is something to celebrate, but it is also motivation to keep moving forward. Together, we can ensure Minnesota's Guard has a strong voice today and for generations to come.

Sincerely- Maggie

"We are happy to announce NGAMN is joining 38 National Guard Associations to provide members State Sponsored Life Insurance benefits through **Armed Forces Benefit Association.**"

Executive Director Lyle Rock

What does this new partnership mean for NGAMN members?

Seamless transition and coverage will continue without interruption.
There is no action needed on your part.

Our new Minnesota-based briefers, including former members of the Minnesota National Guard will begin visiting units soon.

Why partner with AFBA?

A nonprofit trusted and endorsed by 39 state associations
25 years of providing SSLI coverage to the National Guard
Over 200,000 insured Guard members and their families
$204 million in survivor benefits paid to National Guard beneficiaries

Tailored to the real-life needs of the Minnesota National Guard
Life insurance member benefits underwritten by 5Star Life Insurance Company specifically designed for those who serve.

Service that's mission-ready

24-hour coverage with no war, terrorism or occupational exclusions
Keep the coverage after you retire or separate as long as contributions are paid
Guaranteed Issue coverage on Members and Spouse regardless of health

Making the hardest days easier

$1,000 non-contributory survivor benefit
Emergency Death Benefit = Fast claim payments
Family survivor college scholarship

Protect your family and support your NGAMN family.
Learn more about AFBA and the SSLI by visiting
www.ssli.org

2026 NGAUS Conference

Highlights & Takeaways

The National Guard Association of the United States held its 148th General Conference & Exhibition in Indianapolis under the theme “The National Guard: America’s Strength at Home & Abroad.” The conference brought together Army and Air National Guard officers, senior military leaders, industry partners and families for professional development, association business and discussions on the Guard’s future.

Readiness, modernization and support for service members and families were central themes. Gen. Steve Nordhaus, chief of the National Guard Bureau, and Senior Enlisted Advisor John Raines emphasized four priorities: warfighters and families, readiness, partnerships and modernization. They highlighted the importance of family and employer support, legislative efforts to address personnel challenges, and investments in aircraft, cyber capabilities, artificial intelligence and unmanned systems. Their message underscored the need to adapt quickly while sustaining the Guard’s ability to respond at home and fight alongside the Joint Force overseas.

Gen. Christopher LaNeve, acting Army chief of staff, reinforced the Army Guard’s essential role in homeland defense, warfighting and power projection. He stressed disciplined training, equipment readiness and Soldier fundamentals while discussing the transition to more mobile brigade combat teams. He also emphasized the State Partnership Program’s contribution to relationships and interoperability with allies and partners.

Association activities included legislative resolutions, task force meetings, officer elections and dedicated professional development for company grade officers. Army and Air separate sessions and the industry exhibition provided opportunities to discuss service-specific requirements, explore emerging capabilities and strengthen relationships across states and industry. Delegates elected Maj. Gen. Gary Keefe of Massachusetts as NGAUS chairman of the board.

Save the Date!

NGAUS National Conference

149th General Conference & Exhibition | Salt Lake City, Utah

August 27-30, 2027

Eagle Rising Award presented to Major Patrick Kooiker



Each year, approximately four **Company Grade Officers have the opportunity to attend the national conference for professional development in a funded status.** This includes all travel expenses, allowing them to spend the weekend engaging with guest speakers and participating in development sessions alongside Army and Air Guard Officers from across the nation. Along with the Capital Summit, this event offers an outstanding opportunity to witness the tangible benefits of NGAUS membership in strengthening the National Guard force. It also provides CGOs the chance to network with and pose questions directly to Department of Defense leadership. Here are some reflections from our CGOs who attended the 2026 Conference in Indianapolis:

"I highly recommend that other Company Grade Officers get involved in future conferences, as it was a key experience in my early career development. The conference itself is a gateway to a system within the National Guard which many are not privy too. If you become a representative, you can vote on policies that benefit your region. The exposition consisted of countless vendors with the latest weapon platforms, systems, and defense related goods, which opens your mind the possibilities for improvement in our war-fighting capabilities.

The briefing I enjoyed the most was from General Nordhaus, the Chief of the National Guard Bureau. As an MDAY service member, it is difficult at times to stay current in policies and have visibility in the direction the National Guard is heading. Understanding General Nordhaus's intent not only serves as a guideline for leadership at the Company Grade level, but it also helps to manage expectations in terms of long-term family planning.

I was able to engage with other CGOs across the country, hear their stories and lessons learned, and create a network of peers to lean on for support as we progress forward in our careers in the National Guard. I was also able to engage with Senior Leaders within the State, to include retired O5-O7s, TAG, and members of the Joint Staff. As a Junior Officer, creating these connections allows you to receive mentorship that has culminated from many years of experience."

1LT Austin Scavello, 34ID

"Company grade officers should participate because NGAUS provides access to senior leaders, SMEs, and Guard members from across the nation. It offers a broader understanding of the policy, resourcing, readiness, and force development issues that affect units. The breakout sessions for CGOs also give a more relevant and peer-to-peer mentoring avenue for development. Attending also helps junior officers build professional networks and bring practical ideas back to their organizations.

The briefing I enjoyed most was the discussion with the CW5s. As an Air Force member, I have had limited exposure to warrant officers and their roles within the force. With my Minnesota squadron appointing the state's first Air Force warrant officer, the briefing was especially relevant. It gave me a better understanding of warrant officer responsibilities, their technical leadership value, and how they can be effectively integrated into future missions and organizational efforts.

The social events were both enjoyable and practical. They provided ample time to engage with peers in a relaxed, professional environment and connect with members from other services, career fields, and states. These conversations were productive and helped me establish valuable contacts, share experiences, and learn from perspectives outside my normal organization.

I appreciate the opportunity to have represented our state at this conference and look forward to attending in the future."

2d Lt Ben Nielsen, 133rd AW

Minnesota National Guard's 148th Fighter Wing, elected officials, businesses, civic organizations, and individuals *fight* for F-35 basing in Duluth.

9 Squadrons Competing for 2 Opportunities

On October 30th, elected officials, business leaders and community partners gathered at the Duluth Air Base to demonstrate regional support for bringing the F-35 Lightning II to the 148th Fighter Wing. Hosted by the Duluth Area Chamber of Commerce's Military Affairs Committee, the press conference highlighted the Wing's military capabilities, economic importance and strong community partnerships.

Nearly 55 letters of support and 6 resolutions of support from the cities of Duluth, Hermantown, Proctor, Two Harbors, and Rice Lake, along with a St Louis County resolution were sent to the Secretary of the Air Force - Troy Meink to demonstrate a unified regional commitment to the 148th's future as the Air Force considers its next F-35 basing locations.

"As we make the case for the F-35, we bring a proud record of performance, experience operating in demanding northern conditions, access to exceptional training airspace, and a workforce committed to the mission. We also bring something that cannot be measured on a readiness report: a community invested in our success. The F-35 basing decision is still ahead, and strong community support remains critical to securing the long-term future of a manned fighter mission at the 148th Fighter Wing. Our selection will help shape the future of military aviation in Duluth and the opportunities available to the next generation of Bulldogs." Col. Curt Grayson, 148th Fighter Wing Commander



Advocacy is needed now to ensure the 148th progressses through the first round of selections.

Contact Kristen Augé at 952-913-5979 or Kristen.L.Auge.mil@army.mil for specifics.

Black Hawks
Critically Underfunded Nationally!

Some pushes for modernization are Minnesota-specific. Others are nationwide needs. Currently, all 54 National Guard states and territories are advocating for a multiyear UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter procurement contract in order to modernize the fleet in parity with the active component.

In FY 2027, the Army's budget request included just one new Black Hawk helicopter for the entire Army. The National Guard estimates it needs more than 200 new aircraft, and 24 in FY 2027 alone. If procurement continues to be drastically underfunded, a critical capability gap will jeopardize the Guard's ability to respond to state emergencies and deploy overseas.

The Black Hawk is the backbone of Army aviation, particularly in the National Guard, which makes up half of the Army's total rotary-wing capability. The versatile aircraft carries out life- saving domestic disaster relief and combat operations abroad. They are vital to the Guard's unique dual-state and federal mission.

The Army's Black Hawk fleet is aging rapidly, with half of all aircraft in the Army National Guard exceeding their 25-year service life by 2031. In Minnesota, our state's aerial medical evacuation company flies aging UH-60L models, some of which are 40 years old and scheduled for divestment with no plan to replace them. The cost to operate these outdated UH-60Ls is double the cost of a modernized UH-60M model. Additionally, legacy airframes lack the advanced avionics, communication, and survivability systems necessary for today's complex battlefields, putting our soldiers at a severe disadvantage.

Because next-generation rotary platforms will not be widely fielded for at least another decade, stable and sufficient modernization funding is a critical and immediate national security need to bridge the gap and replace existing platforms that will be in our formations into the 2070s.

The Minnesota National Guard urges Congress procure at least 225 UH-60M Black Hawks in an indefinite delivery/indefinite quantity or multi-year contract, and for the Army National Guard to be the third unit equipped with each new platform.

Lt. Col. Mindy Davis

Capitol Summit

Highlights & Takeaways

When I went to the Capitol Summit as a 255N CW2 in Spring of 2025, I went in expecting a networking trip and came out with a completely different understanding of my own job. As a network management technician, my world was routers, baseband, spectrum, and whatever the unit had on hand to make the network work. I knew what equipment we had and what we didn't. What I did not know was why. The Capitol Summit is a three-day fly-in to Washington, D.C., one of two officer professional development programs NGAUS runs for Army and Air National Guard company-grade officers and junior warrants, and it brings Guardsmen from every state and territory in to see how the federal government actually works and where NGAUS sits in that process. For a technical warrant, that's the missing half of the picture. The gear I was troubleshooting on drill weekend traced back to a line in an appropriations bill that somebody had to fight for.

The agenda runs out of the National Guard Memorial on Massachusetts Avenue and includes a welcome reception, a night tour of the city, legislative staff briefings, and senior leader engagements. But the part that stuck with me was the Hill visits. In the spring 2025 session, we met with staffers in Rep. Brad Finstad's office and in Sen. Gary Peters' office. I had the chance to talk about TRICARE and what it has meant for my family — not as a policy abstraction, but as a real, measurable improvement in how we handle care. From there we made the ask: that they look into expanded TRICARE coverage for gray zone members, the population that falls into the gap between service and eligibility. The staffers told us dental would likely be the first offering to move. That answer was the whole lesson in miniature. Benefits don't arrive all at once; they arrive incrementally, one line at a time, because somebody kept asking. That is exactly the long line of wins NGAUS has secured for the Guard over the decades and sitting in that office I could see the mechanism working in real time.

If you're a warrant or a O grade company officer, this is worth three days of your life. Most of us in the technical career fields never get exposure to the legislative side that funds our equipment, protects our benefits, and shapes our force structure, and the Capitol Summit fills that gap directly. It also teaches a skill warrants don't usually practice: taking what we know from the motor pool and the server rack and translating it into something a legislative aide can carry into a markup. The other half of the value is the people. You spend three days with peers from every state and territory, plus NGAUS leadership and senior Guard leaders, and those relationships outlast the trip. Selection runs through your state or territory association, so if you're interested, talk to your association's executive director or president.



Maj. Patrick Kooiker

National Guard Education Foundation and the Legion de Lafayette

Too often the general public, and sometimes even our own families, doesn't understand the unique domestic and federal missions that the National Guard is called upon to carry out. The term, National Guard, was bestowed by the Marquis de Lafayette during his 1824 visit to New York's 7 the Regiment and is based on France's Guard Nationale de Paris.

The National Guard Education Foundation (NGEF) was established in 1975 as a separate, non-profit organization whose goal is to tell the National Guard's story. The purpose of the Foundation is to achieve an awareness of the rich heritage and continuing contributions of the National Guard of the United States.

The centerpiece of the Foundation is the National Guard Museum in Washington, D.C. This is the only museum that celebrates and honors all of the National Guard, from the first muster in 1636 to the current operational focus of the Guard. The museum features uniforms, firearms, battle gear and other artifacts throughout the exhibit space. The newest Gallery, The Citizen-Soldier in WWII, elegantly reflects the modern trend of interactivity. Of exciting note is an upcoming display featuring the efforts of the 34th and the 36th Infantry Divisions during WWII. The Education Foundation is still looking for artifacts from the 34th Infantry Division to be loaned to them for this exhibit. If you are aware of special items of interest, please reach out to William Roulett, Deputy Director of the Museum, at 202-789-0031.

The second major component of the NGEF is its extensive library. The library contains records of the NG Association back to its foundation in 1878. Of special interest to Minnesotans is the collection of the Walsh Correspondences. General Walsh was a former Minnesota TAG and very influential in the Guard's continuance after WWII through his work as the president of the National Guard Association. The library also maintains resources for educators and a wealth of unit histories for historians.

More recently, the Foundation has begun producing Militia Minute, which provides a contemporary sample of the Guard's relevance in today's environment. It also provides stories of valor and bravery of our forefathers.

The Education Foundation administers numerous scholarship programs for the benefit of National Guard members and family members. The USAA Guardian Scholarship Fund provides college scholarships to the children of Guardsmen who have been lost in service to our nation since 9/11. The Van Hipp Heroes Scholarship Fund awards scholarships to Guard members wounded in action in the War on Terror from all proceeds of Mr. Van Hipp's book, The New Terrorism: How to Fight it and Defeat It. Lastly, the NGEF has partnered with the Honor Flights Network to link up and pay for National Guard Association members to serve as guardians on these flights to Washington, D.C. If you are interested in becoming a flight volunteer, contact Luke Guthrie, NGEF Director of Development, at 202-408-5886 or email luke.guthrie@ngaus.org.

The Education Foundation is completely funded through donations. The NGEF acknowledges contributions of $10,000 or more by bestowing the prestigious Legion de Lafayette (LDL) badge to donors. With this badge donors become lifetime members of this Legion. These donors are recognized in a special induction ceremony and reception at the National Guard Memorial in Washington, D.C., and their names are permanently inscribed on the LDL Wall of Honor. They are invited as distinguished guests to all future annual NGAUS conferences (conference fee is waived), where they receive VIP perks such as personalized pick up/return to conference airport, front row seating at all general sessions (great when US President speaks), invitations to special hospitality events, and exclusive invitations to head table and TAG receptions.

Minnesota Guard members who have been inducted into the Legion de Lafayette membership include Col (Ret) Eric and Maj (Ret) Lori Ahlness, BG (Ret) Marianne E. Watson in memory of Colonel Grant E. Zachary, BG (Ret) Tim and Susan Kennedy, Maj (Ret) Chris and Korrie Kline, and LTC (Ret) Geraldine Longfellow (newest members). Even former President Ronald Reagan contributed to be a member. Additionally, there are several former and current Minnesota National Guard members who are considering becoming LDL members. To learn more about the opportunity to become a Legion de Lafayette member, or to discuss payment options, contact Luke Guthrie, NGEF Director of Development, at 202-408-5886 or email luke.guthrie@ngaus.org. By Eric and Lori Ahlness

2026 Holiday Party

The National Guard Association of Minnesota Officers' Holiday Party is

December 4, 2026

Please join us at the
Embassy Suites Minneapolis Airport
7901 34th Ave South, Bloomington, MN 55425

Guest Speaker - Larry Fonder
County Veterans Service Officer at Sherburne County

The attire is Business/Business casual. It is a great evening to break out that Christmas tie and/or socks. Social hour starts at 6 p.m. Meal served at 7:15 p.m. Onsite parking is free. Come join us for an evening of information and fun!

The cost for the dinner is $65 per person.
Champagne Chicken which is pan seared chicken breast with roasted grapes and leeks in a light cream sauce. Served with roasted fingerling potatoes and asparagus. Includes a house salad and a chocolate mousse dessert.
Two complimentary drink tickets with each meal. All dinners include regular and decaf coffee, hot and iced tea.

Please let us know if you have any dietary restrictions.

Register at:

https://www.ngamn.org/events

by November 27th!

Save the Date!

NGAMN State Conference

122st State General Conference & Exhibition | Cloquet, MN
April 16-18 2027

2026 Scholarship Recipients

Congratulations to the following college students for their outstanding essays this year!

Max Brown

$1000 McGough Scholarship
University of MN
Nursing



Adam Winter

$1000 NGAMN Scholarship
University of MN- Duluth
Civil Engineering



Alexa Thompson

$500 NGAMN Scholarship
Minnesota State University, Mankato
Marketing



William Malecha

$500 NGAMN Scholarship
Milwaukee School of Engineering
Electrical Engineering



McGough

A very special thank you to McGough for their continued support in recognizing our students!

612-978-8473
director@ngamn.org
www.ngamn.org

National Guard Association of Minnesota
8362 Tamarack Village, #119-444
St. Paul, MN
55125

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