

THE VOICE

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE NATIONAL GUARD ASSOCIATION OF WASHINGTON
FEBRUARY 2026

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Written by President Fernando Garcia

As we move into the warmer months, our focus is clear. Advocacy. Engagement. Execution.

The legislative session is now underway. This is where our association remains fully engaged. We continue working with state leaders to protect readiness, benefits, and quality of life for service members and families. Our presence matters. We stay informed. We stay involved.

The past few months also reminded us why this work matters. In partnership with JSS, we supported service members who were actively supporting communities affected by the Washington floods. Gift cards and goodie bags were provided to those on mission, offering practical support during long and demanding days. This effort reflected the strength of our partnerships and our ability to respond when our Guard members are called to serve.

Looking ahead, several key events are on the calendar. Legislative Workshops in March will prepare members for effective engagement during our future state legislative sessions. Industry Day will bring members and partners together to strengthen relationships and advance shared goals, and we will celebrate together later that day with a member BBQ. In May, we will gather for the State Conference, our largest opportunity of the year to connect, learn, and move the association forward.

To our corporate partners, your engagement continues to drive real impact across the state. Your support strengthens our advocacy efforts, as well as our ability to provide direct support to service members and families.

To our members, thank you for your continued commitment and trust. The months ahead require focus and participation. This association remains ready to lead.

I look forward to seeing many of you at our upcoming events and continuing this work together.

Fernando Garcia
President
National Guard Association of Washington

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QUARTERLY NGAW MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

Meeting Date: 22 Jan 2026

Board Members Present: Garcia, Morgan, Wahto, Ulsted, Cole

Employees Present: McMichael, Golonka, Wessman

Review of minutes from previous meeting. Minutes approved.

Business Report

- Insurance: Erin inquiring if equipment at the Campground is covered by our existing NGAW policy
- Investments: Jeff discussed a new investment strategy involving a laddered CD maturity plan, recommending a three-month investment due to better interest rates; motion passed

Industry Day

- Conflict Kinetics arriving Monday, March 16 to set up Gunfighter Gym
- Tanya coordinating either pre or post event gathering for vendors
- Tanya coordinating Member BBQ following event, will replace box lunch for vendors, requesting retiree volunteers

State Conference/Militia Ball

- We're managing registrations for both
- Sophia requested NGAUS rep for conference
- Board agreed to have TAG & ATAGs speak at conference with no additional guest speaker

Membership Report

- Numbers remain consistent
- Tanya will talk to necessary Training Officers about meeting with OCS Phase III on either April 2 or 12
- Question of who to talk to about meeting with newly commissioned Air Officers?

Legislative Report

- Sophia presented Bill Tracker for current session (10 Jan- 12 March).
- Visit: <https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?2021> to check current bill status

Scholarships

- Application window: 1 March-15 April
- Add anti-AI statement to application, explaining the use of AI may affect approval of scholarships

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LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Written by Legislative Director Sophia Wahto

The Washington State legislative session kicked-off on January 10th and will continue until March 12th. Your Washington State Legislature will continue to advance a wide range of proposals focused on improving economic opportunity, housing stability, education access, civic participation, and long-term support for Military members, their families, and Veterans alike. The NGAW Legislative Team has been working closely with the Veterans Legislative Coalition (VLC), Washington Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA), the Washington Military Department, as well as State Legislators to ensure your voices are heard through strength and accurate discourse.

Key areas of legislation include:

- **Employment & Economic Opportunity:** Proposals include employer tax credits for hiring veterans and military spouses, protections against employment discrimination, expanded veteran job training and reentry programs, as well as initiatives supporting veteran-owned businesses.
- **Housing & Property Tax Relief:** Several bills aim to reduce housing costs through down payment assistance, adaptive housing tax preferences, property tax exemptions, and valuation freezes for disabled veterans, seniors, and military families.
- **Education & Military Families:** Legislation promotes education stability for children of military families, expands access to early learning programs, provides tuition waivers and grants for dependents and survivors, and supports on-base school construction efforts.
- **National Guard Retention & Military Justice:** Measures include the create of a Washington National Guard retention program, updates to the Washington Uniformed Code of Military Justice to strengthen victim protections, and formal recognition projects such as a Global War on Terror Memorial.
- **Voting and Civic Engagement:** Bills would expand secure electronic ballot access for service members, overseas and disabled voters, and improve coordination with tribal governments to ensure full participation in elections.
- **Veterans Benefits & Governance:** Additional proposals ensure continued access to State benefits and updates the structure of Veterans advisory bodies.
- **Capabilities:** As we advance into the future with current and emerging threats – counter unmanned aerial systems (cUAS) are emphasized in emerging legislation as widely available and dangerous drones pose a risk to public safety.

Many of these bills have upcoming hearings or are actively moving through committee in the interest of supporting Washington's Military and Veteran communities. NGAW will continue monitoring, educating, and aiding advocating efforts closely. Further ensuring that these policies strengthen readiness, retention, and quality of life for our service members and their families.

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LEGISLATIVE UPDATE, CONT.

Written by Legislative Director Sophia Wahto

On Jan. 28, 2026, a distinct group of Air and Army Washington National Guard members, participated in the 2026 Legislative Day at the Washington State Legislature. This event aligned with the annual recognition of Washington Army and Air National Guard Day (officially observed on January 26 under state law), which honors the service and contributions of National Guard members in the state.

During the visit to the House and Senate, our representatives, including Senior Enlisted Leader Washington National Guard Allan Lawson and NGAW Legislative Director Sophia Wahto, had the opportunity to observe live Senate voting, meet Senators off of the floor, and gain valuable insight into the legislative process.



Understanding how legislation is developed and enacted is essential to effectively advocate for military members, their families, and veterans, ensuring their needs and concerns are accurately represented. Overall, the experience was highly educational and provided a valuable opportunity to represent the National Guard while deepening our understanding of State government.

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2025-26 INDUSTRY DAY: NEW DATE

Our 2025 Industry Day event was *supposed* to be on Nov. 6, but after much deliberation and conferring with TAG, we decided to postpone the event due to the government shutdown. The good news is that we have rescheduled the event, and our fantastic Corporate Partners will be on Camp Murray NEXT MONTH to meet with all of you and show off their businesses and capabilities.



VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

We need YOUR help! We're hosting a BBQ following Industry Day, and we need volunteers to run the grill. Whether you're a Lifetime Member, Retiree, or you're just curious what NGAW is all about, join us for a hotdog! Contact us at ngaw@ngaw.org if you're able to help out.

**This could
be you!**



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SAVE THE DATE 2026 CONFERENCE & MILITIA BALL SATURDAY, MAY 16

2026 NGAW Conference
& Adjutant General's Militia Ball
REMEMBER AND HONOR

Saturday, 16 May 2026
Tacoma Convention Center
1500 Commerce St., Tacoma, WA

 NGAW Conference
Time TBD

 Militia Ball
Social Hour 4:30 PM
Opening Ceremony 6:00 PM
Closing Ceremony 8:00 PM

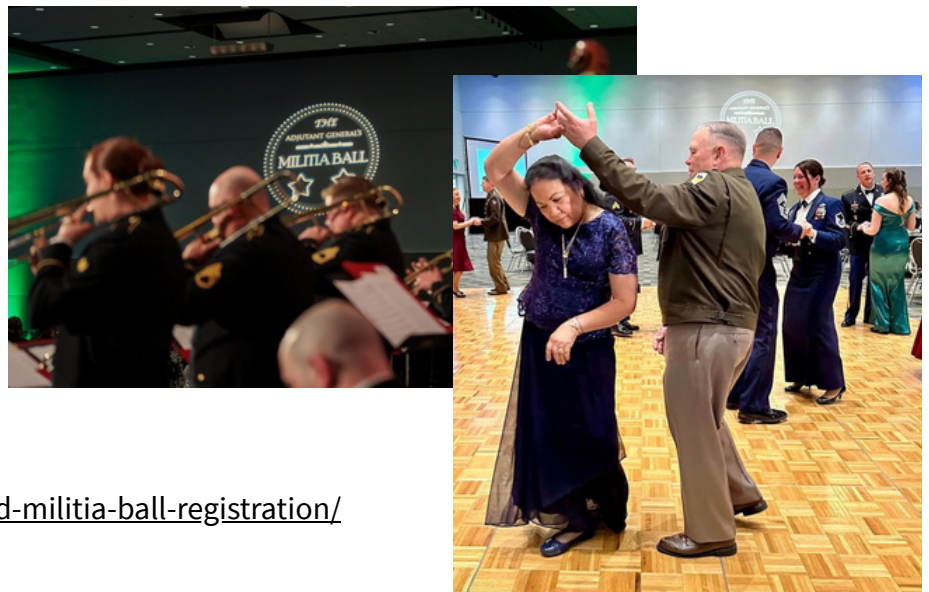
Join us for our annual conference, followed by a formal evening out.
We will celebrate and commemorate the GWOT era throughout the events.

*This nation will remain the land of the free
only so long as it is the home of the brave.*

We invite you to join us at the Tacoma Convention Center on Sat., May 16, for the **2026 Adjutant General's Militia Ball** following our annual State Conference. The exact times for the conference activities are still to be determined, but the evening's events will begin with a Cocktail Hour at 4:30pm and the Opening Ceremony at 6pm.

Register today at:

<https://ngaw.org/2026-state-conference-and-militia-ball-registration/>



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2026 SCHOLARSHIPS

The application for our 2026 Scholarships will open on March 1! NGAW members and their dependents are eligible for a variety of scholarships offered by NGAW, the NGAW Foundation, and USAA (enlisted only), with awards starting at \$500. Last year we awarded over \$8,000 in scholarships to our members and their dependents!

Our scholarships are available for Soldiers and Airmen, Officers and Enlisted, members and their dependents. Applicants must be a current or lifetime member of NGAW or the dependent of a current or lifetime member. Applicants must submit an essay and two letters of recommendation. For current Guardsmen, one letter must come from your Unit Commander or First Sergeant. All applications must be submitted by the **April 15, 2026** deadline. Recipients will be announced prior to our State Conference.

For more information and to apply, check out our [Scholarships page](https://ngaw.org/scholarships/), where you can also learn about a variety of other scholarships open to our members (<https://ngaw.org/scholarships/>).



HOW CAN WE HELP YOU?

NGAW is YOUR association. How can we help you and your unit? NGAW would love to support your unit event. Do you need coffee for your volunteers or do you need some of our members to help by volunteering? Would our campground be a good spot for your warm-weather event? Do you need financial assistance for a holiday event? Let us help you! Contact our office at ngaw@ngaw.org or complete the Unit Event Support Request form on the Contact Us page of our website: <https://ngaw.org/unit-supportrequest/>. Let us help you.

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DO YOU HAVE A LIFETIME MEMEBRSHIP?

Is remembering to renew your NGAW membership each year a struggle? Do you wish there was a set-it-and-forget-it option? There is! NGAW has affordable lifetime membership options for both Enlisted and Officers.

These memberships are offered to both those currently serving in the WA National Guard, as well as retirees, and installment payment options are available. For more information contact ngaw@ngaw.org or visit: ngaw.org/membership-account/membershiplevels/.

Lifetime Member Benefits Include:

- Dedicated advocates in Olympia and on Capitol Hill fighting for your benefits
- Access to exclusive professional development, networking and educational opportunities
- Eligibility for member and dependent scholarships
- Insurance supplements designed for members of the National Guard
- The opportunity to serve on association committees and task forces that help drive the future of Guard advocacy
- A super cool commemorative NGAW insulated mug!

UPCOMING EVENTS

March 17 Industry Day & Member BBQ

Mar 22-23 EANGUS Workshops

May 16 NGAW State Conference & Militia Ball

July 31-Aug 4 EANGUS Conference

Aug 28-31 NGAUS Conference



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WE NEED YOUR CIVILIAN EMAIL ADDRESS!

Please update your membership account with a **civilian email address** so that you can better view our messages.

THANK YOU CORPORATE PARTNERS

