



**THE ENLISTED ASSOCIATION NATIONAL GUARD OF ARIZONA
STATE CONFERENCE MINUTES
26 April 2025
Tempe Mission Palms, Tempe AZ**

CALL TO ORDER – President Thompson called the meeting to order at 1235

ROLL CALL

President Thompson welcomed and recognized the State's Senior Leaders, VIPs, and Past Presidents, and Executive Council members

- Arizona's Senior Leaders
 - The Adjutant General, Major General Kerry Muehlenbeck
 - Command Sergeant Major Jayson Matlock, 5th Command Senior Enlisted Leader, Arizona National Guard
 - Command Chief Master Sergeant James Wright, State Command Chief, Arizona Air National Guard
 - Command Sergeant Major Graydon Griffin, State Command Sergeant Major, Arizona Army National Guard

- Arizona Enlisted Association Executive Council
 - Vice President Air – MSgt (Ret) Ashley Outland
 - Vice President Army - CSM (Ret) Shane Arnold
 - VP Junior Enlisted – SSG Adam Kushner
 - Secretary - Vacant
 - Treasurer – CMSgt Raul Verdugo (not present)
 - Army Director – SFC Christopher Callahan
 - Air Director – SMSgt Candy Steptore (not present)
 - Retiree Director – CSM (Ret) Dave Austin
 - At Large Director - CMSgt Celia Alosi (not present)

GUEST SPEAKERS

Maj General Muehlenbeck - MG Meuhlenbeck discussed the role and value of professional association membership, emphasizing that participation is ultimately a personal decision and should not be influenced through coercion or rank. She noted that membership in organizations such as EANGA, NGA AZ, and other professional associations is open to officers, enlisted members, and family members in various capacities, and serves as a means of supporting the profession of arms and personal development.

She encouraged members to promote association involvement through peer-to-peer engagement and mentorship rather than directive influence, highlighting that senior leaders are restricted in how directly they can advocate for membership. She stressed the importance of broadening development through association participation, noting that involvement in organizations, conferences, and similar forums broadens perspective, enhances professional competence, and strengthens performance at both state and national levels.

MG Muehlenbeck further encouraged attendance at national-level events, stating that such experiences expand professional networks, improve communication skills, and positively influence performance in daily duties, boards, and promotion processes. She concluded by emphasizing the value of service, camaraderie, and shared purpose within the National Guard, noting that while missions remain constant, it is the people and relationships that define the strength and character of the organization.

Command Senior Enlisted Leader, CSM Matlock - CSM Matlock provided an overview of his role and priorities. He explained that he works alongside senior enlisted leaders from both the Army and Air National Guard to advocate for and support enlisted personnel across the state, serving as a key link between the force and senior leadership. Drawing on his extensive experience at both the state and national levels, he emphasized the importance of collaboration and open communication, encouraging members to raise concerns through their chains of command or directly to him.

CSM Matlock highlighted his focus on leader development, particularly through broadening opportunities outside of the state, such as National Guard Bureau assignments, temporary duty tours, and interstate position swaps. He noted that these experiences enhance professional growth while ensuring that knowledge and expertise are ultimately returned to the state. He also discussed ongoing efforts to improve training opportunities, including the use of simulations and other developmental initiatives. He concluded by reiterating his commitment to supporting the enlisted force and maintaining an open-door policy, offering to elevate concerns to senior leadership as needed.

State Command Chief, CCMSgt James Wright - Chief Wright, the State Command Chief of the Arizona Air National Guard and counterpart to Command Sergeant Major Griffin, provided an overview of his background and current priorities. With nearly 28 years of service across the Marine Corps and multiple roles within the Air National Guard, he brings broad experience across maintenance, recruiting, manpower, and personnel, as well as service in various duty statuses. He emphasized that this diverse background reflects the flexibility of the Air Guard and informs his approach to leadership.

He explained that the Arizona Air National Guard consists of approximately 2,700 authorized personnel. Recruitment and retention remain top priorities, with a dual focus on bringing in non-prior service members and retaining experienced Airmen to avoid capability gaps.

He also highlighted development as a key effort, noting that the Air Guard is incorporating best practices from the Army to strengthen training and leadership development. These efforts tie directly into overall readiness, which he described as the central focus encompassing manning, training, and the ability to effectively execute missions.

He emphasized the responsibility of senior leaders to ensure readiness through honest assessments and open discussion of deficiencies. He stressed that identifying and addressing gaps now is critical to ensuring Airmen are properly prepared for future missions and that leadership must remain focused on putting the force in the best possible position before sending personnel into harm's way.

In response to questions on Army–Air integration, Chief Wright emphasized that future operations would require much closer coordination between the two components, particularly in less secure and more austere environments. He noted that, unlike past deployments where infrastructure and security were largely established, future scenarios will require both Army and Air forces to jointly build, operate, and defend locations from the ground up. This will drive a greater need for shared training, especially in areas such as base defense, logistics, and operating with limited resources. He highlighted the importance of starting with deliberate planning discussions and gradually progressing to joint exercises, acknowledging that while there is some frustration due to evolving concepts, these conversations are necessary to build effective integration over time.

Regarding recruiting and retention, Chief Wright explained that challenges vary by location and mission set rather than reflecting a single systemic issue. Some areas are performing well overall, while others face difficulties tied to mission requirements, geographic factors, or the complexity of filling highly specialized roles. He noted that certain positions are inherently harder to fill and require longer timelines or more targeted efforts. While potential structural or organizational changes have been discussed, he emphasized that such decisions are complex and would require careful consideration due to their broad operational impact.

CSM Graydon Griffin - CSM Griffin emphasized that his primary focus, after two years in the role, is addressing immediate Soldier concerns while building long-term leadership strength across the formation. A key priority is developing enlisted leaders—particularly at the E5 and E6 levels—by identifying capability gaps and implementing targeted, internally resourced training such as team and squad leader development courses. His intent is to strengthen leadership continuity and confidence at all levels.

He also highlighted the need to improve the connection between the Enlisted Association and the broader force. He noted ongoing challenges in communicating the association’s value and encouraged leveraging better storytelling and visibility of its impact to increase awareness, engagement, and membership.

Regarding fitness testing, it was shared that the Army is transitioning from the ACFT to a new Army Fitness Test (AFT). The AFT will consist of five events, removing the standing power throw, and will introduce both general and combat-based standards with MOS-specific scoring. While full details are still forthcoming, the ACFT is expected to phase out around June, with AFT implementation planned for the next fiscal year. Regardless of these changes, the importance of individual commitment to physical fitness was emphasized as the critical factor for success.

He was also asked about bridging the gap between the Enlisted Association and the broader enlisted force—particularly considering senior leader attrition, loss of institutional knowledge, and limited training resources, CSM Griffin acknowledged the challenge and emphasized the importance of prioritizing leadership development and resource management. He noted that while budget constraints and competing requirements impact training opportunities, efforts are being made to leverage available resources to provide development opportunities for M-Day Soldiers rather than over-relying on full-time staff. He highlighted the use of programs such as team leader and squad leader courses to build foundational leadership skills and stressed the

value of mentorship, shared experiences, and learning through execution. Additionally, he encouraged leaders at all levels to proactively communicate training needs, plan ahead, and utilize available funding streams, while continuing to provide feedback and recommendations to improve access to training and development across the formation.

SGM (Ret) Wyatt Davis, SSLI Benefits Briefer - Wyatt Davis provided an overview of his current role supporting service members across all states and territories by delivering briefings on life insurance benefits. He emphasized that his team's mission is to ensure Soldiers and Airmen fully understand their coverage and how their insurance needs evolve throughout their careers and during major life events. He highlighted the importance of consistent, annual engagement to reinforce awareness and build familiarity with available benefits.

He also provided a general overview of the State Sponsored Life Insurance (SSLI) program, explaining its historical origins and its role as a supplemental benefit available to National Guard members. He noted that the program is managed in part through state associations and that participation contributes to both individual coverage and broader support within the state. Additionally, he highlighted key program features, including expedited financial assistance to families in the event of a loss, underscoring the importance of maintaining accurate beneficiary information and regularly reviewing coverage.

He requested continued leadership support to ensure these briefings are incorporated into training schedules and stressed the importance of accountability at the enlisted level to ensure attendance. He noted that timely awareness of benefits can have a significant impact, particularly during unexpected or life-altering situations, and shared an example illustrating how early engagement enabled support to a service member during a critical period.

Wyatt concluded by reiterating the importance of leader engagement and member participation in these briefings to ensure all personnel are informed and prepared, and he offered continued support from his team to units across the state.

Auxiliary President – Deni Austin - Deni Austin, Auxiliary President for EANGA, provided an overview of the Auxiliary's history, mission, and current activities. She noted that the Auxiliary has a long-standing presence supporting National Guard members and their families, though it experienced a period of inactivity and is now reestablished and focused on rebuilding membership. She emphasized that eligibility extends beyond spouses to include service members as associate members, as well as family members, friends, and supporters of the Guard.

Deni highlighted the Auxiliary's primary role as an advocacy organization that works alongside EANGA and EANGUS to represent the interests of service members and their families at both the state and national levels, particularly in legislative efforts where uniformed members cannot directly engage. She underscored the Auxiliary's contributions to securing key benefits over time, including expanded access to military facilities and long-term healthcare benefits, reinforcing the importance of continued advocacy.

She also summarized recent Auxiliary activities, including participation in national and regional conferences, collaboration with EANGA events, community engagement efforts, and regular

virtual meetings to maintain operations across the state. Leadership representation has expanded, with her recent election to a regional director position, further strengthening Arizona's voice at higher levels.

Membership growth remains a priority, as current numbers are limited, and Ms. Austin encouraged increased participation to strengthen the organization's impact. She concluded by reiterating the value of the Auxiliary as a supportive partner and advocacy voice for the Guard community and expressed appreciation for the continued support from EANGA leadership.

REPORTS

President's Report - President Thompson reported that the organization has remained highly active over the past year, supported by the Executive Council, with a continued focus on membership growth and engagement. Membership goals were successfully met, surpassing the previous target and reaching the mid-500 range, with continued progress into the current year. A new goal has been established to further increase membership, and efforts remain ongoing to recruit and retain members through outreach and engagement at events.

The organization participated in numerous events throughout the year, including family days, battle handoffs, and professional development engagements, providing opportunities to educate and connect with Soldiers and Airmen. Support was also provided to key events such as the E9 Summit and TAG match, as well as volunteer and community support activities. Scholarships remain a key initiative, with multiple awards presented to support members and their families.

President Thompson provided a legislative update, noting continued challenges in advancing federal initiatives such as TRICARE for All and GI Bill parity, which must be reintroduced each session despite growing support. At the state level, she highlighted concerns regarding Senate Bill 1495 ("Defend the Guard"), encouraged members to stay informed and engage appropriately with legislators, and emphasized the importance of advocacy in protecting Guard benefits. She also invited interested members to participate in the Legislative and Resolutions Committee.

The report was submitted as informational and requested to be filed without objection.

Approval of 2025 Minutes

- The secretary position is vacant, so the draft minutes were presented by President Thompson. She began reading the minutes of the 20 April 2024 conference. VP Air Ashley Outland made a motion to dispense the reading of the minutes and approve them as written. VP Army Shane Arnold seconded. There was no discussion and the minutes were approved as written.

Treasurer's Report

Copies of the Treasurer's report were provided to all attendees. Treasurer Verdugo was absent from the meeting, so the report was given by President Thompson. She reported on the current account balances and said that detailed information about the treasurer's report is available upon request. President Thompson moved report for its acceptance. The report has been accepted as presented.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

There is no unfinished business that carried over from 2024 Conference.

NEW BUSINESS

Constitution & Bylaws Amendment –

The current Bylaws last revision was in 2022. A copy of the proposed amendments was provided in your handouts, via email, and on our EANGA website. Karen gave a summary of the proposed Constitution and Bylaws changes. The changes included.

- Article IV (Constitution)– Board of Directors, Sections 6 and 7
- Article I (Bylaws) – Executive Council Powers and Duties, Section 5:
- Article V (Bylaws) – Delegates, Section 5
- Article VI (Bylaws) - Executive Secretary, Sections 1 and 2.
- Article VII (Bylaws) – Arizona Units, Sections 1 and 2

Following the presentation, Karen Craig made a motion to approve all proposed bylaws amendments in block as a single vote. VP Air Outland seconded the motion. There was no discussion from the floor. The motion was put to a vote and passed unanimously. The updated bylaws will be published on the organization’s website.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS AND DELEGATES

President Thompson: President called for elections to fill the five open Arizona Executive Officer positions and two delegates for the 2025 national conference. President Thompson turned the meeting over to Vice President Air Outland who is this year’s nomination’s chair to give the report.

Nominations Chair Outland gave the nominations report and provided an overview of the election procedures. She clarified that nominations would be accepted both in advance and from the floor. The positions currently open for election, along with the individual who submitted an advance declaration of candidacy, are as follows:

- President
- Vice President Army – Shane Arnold
- Treasurer
- Secretary (remaining one year term)
- Air Director
- Retiree Director – Dave Austin

Nominations chair Outland explained that three primary delegates and one alternate delegate would be elected to represent Arizona at the national conference. Each nomination must be accompanied by a motion and a second from the floor to be considered. It was also noted that

only current, dues-paid members of the association are eligible to vote. Nominations chair Outland concluded her report.

President Thompson concluded by stating that this was a committee report and without objection, it would be filed.

ELECTIONS

President Thompson accepted the committee report and let the record reflect that the gavel is turned to Vice President Ashley Outland to conduct officer nominations. Vice President Outland briefed that terms begin at adjournment of the conference and are two years in length unless otherwise noted. She reviewed eligibility requirements for nominees and noted that waivers may be granted by motion if needed. The floor was opened up for nominations.

- President – Mary Thompson
- Vice President Army – Shane Arnold
- Treasurer – Raul Verdugo
- Secretary (remaining one year term) – Deborah Rutledge
- Air Director – Candy Steptore
- Retiree Director – Dave Austin

Requirements to be a delegate for the 2025 National Conference were briefed and the floor was opened for nominations.

- Army Nomination – Adam Kushner
- Air Nomination – Deborah Rutledge
- At Large Nomination – Bailey Callahan
- Army Alternate Nomination – Dave Austin
- Air Alternate Nomination - Ashley Outland
- At Large Alternate Nomination – None

VP Air Outland asked for a motion to accept the nominations for all officer positions and delegates and to cease nominations. The motion was made by VP Army Arnold and seconded by SSG Kushner. Discussion occurred where CSM Ret Austin removed his name as an Army delegate and asked to be placed as an alternate. After that discussion, the motion passed to accept the nominations for all officer positions and delegates to the National Conference.

VOTING

Ballots were passed out.

VP Air Outland turned the gavel and meeting back over to the President.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF NEW OFFICERS AND DELEGATES:

President Thompson directed that the secretary cast one vote for each of the following offices as follows, since there was only one nominee. Each of these candidates was elected by acclamation.

- President – Mary Thompson
- Vice President Army – Shane Arnold
- Treasurer – Raul Verdugo
- Secretary (remaining one year term) – Deborah Rutledge
- Air Director – Candy Steptore
- Retiree Director – Dave Austin

National Conference Delegates:

- Army Nomination – Adam Kushner
- Air Nomination – Deborah Rutledge
- At Large Nomination – Bailey Callahan
- Army Alternate Nomination – Dave Austin
- Air Alternate Nomination – Ashley Outland
- At Large Alternate Nomination

The elections portion was concluded. VP Air Outland asked that the record reflect that the gavel was turned back over to the President. President Thompson congratulated the newly elected officers and delegates and reminded them that their term begins immediately following the conclusion of the conference.

CLOSING REMARKS

President Thompson gave her closing remarks, and reminded everyone that our meetings are the third Thursday at 1700.

ADJOURNMENT:

President Thompson called for a motion to adjourn. Motion to adjourn made by VP Air Ashley Outland and seconded by VP Army Arnold. The meeting adjourned at 1518.