

Correcting the Record on the Space National Guard

By

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At the annual convention of the National Guard Association of the United States (NGAUS), former President Donald Trump made headlines by stating his support for NGAUS' position on a Space National Guard. He said there should be one and that it should be the [“primary combat reserve of the US Space Force.”](#)

While this is a welcome comment from the former president, it is not a new argument to have a Space National Guard. This argument, however, was much maligned, mocked, and [ignored for years](#). Lately, much reporting on the topic is misinformation that confuses both the American people and Congress.

Many who oppose the Space National Guard wrongly believe that space defense is a [strictly federal mission](#). They believe the Guard's deployable space operations, a function since the 1990s, and the nearly 300 years of the Guard's legal and constitutional role does not justify a Guard element for Space Force. They argue that bypassing the constitutional framework and the law of the land, which requires a governor's consent on decisions regarding their state guard forces, is a [“one off.”](#)

If the federal government is allowed to eliminate the role of governors, this would set a dangerous precedent. During congressional testimony, Secretary of the Air Force Frank Kendall discussed a legislative proposal that would do just that and suggested that going around the law “is not a big deal” and that National Guard is [“an artifact of history.”](#) Legislation requiring the support and inclusion of governors is not supported by Kendall.

The opponents of the Space National Guard repeat questionable arguments to confuse and distract the American people and Congress. The false arguments are many.

First, they claim a Space National Guard will result in increased and unsustainable costs and bureaucracy that are [not supported by the Space Force and Air Force](#). This is false as documented by no less than six studies by the Department of the Air Force that supported a Space National Guard.

Five of these studies were [deliberately withheld from Congress by actors external](#) to the Pentagon. Importantly, these studies proved that the costs of establishing a space guard are insignificant because the existing budget will transfer from one line of accounting to another. They also dispute the findings of a Congressional Budget Office (CBO) study (2020) that did not use actual Air Force and National Guard budget data points to project the cost of establishing a Space National Guard.

Shockingly, the CBO did not interview anyone from the National Guard Bureau, the individual state guard components, or the Department of the Air Force's working groups when it conducted the study. In truth, no additional bureaucracy is needed to establish the Space Guard because the staff support and operational squadrons already exist in the Air National Guard and would transfer into the Space National Guard.

Second, detractors argue that states do not need a Space Guard for the limited protection of individual states. This is a mistaken perspective because the National Guard is the nation's primary combat-reserve force—regardless of operating domain—and has been since 1636. It delivers strategic and operational depth to the nation. It is a lower cost alternative to the larger

and more expensive federal force. For example, most of the nation's air sovereignty mission is owned by the Air National Guard because the threat to American air space is not constant.

It is also important to remember that the states are dependent upon space systems for their domestic emergency operations and the capabilities of the National Guard are leveraged for events like [wildfires, earthquakes, floods, and others](#). Space systems are linked to critical infrastructure and therefore fall into the state roles and missions for homeland security. Those who want to use the opportunity to consolidate military space power at the federal level ignore these realities.

Third, the military must have the support of the American people when it is time to go to war. The National Guard, by design, provides a clear and deep connection with the American citizenry. Support for a robust Space National Guard is vital if the nation is to field the force required to win in a time of war. Connecting main streets across the nation with space defense cannot occur through a single component service and the absorption of what is rightfully National Guard capability into the federal military.

The talking points used by Space National Guard opponents are fundamentally misleading and fail to acknowledge the immediate readiness costs associated with taking Air National Guard space units away from their respective states and governors. Keep in mind, about [80 percent of Guard personnel surveyed suggested that they will not transfer to the US Space Force unless there is a Space National Guard](#). All 50 governors oppose the removal of the space missions from the National Guard.

If opponents of a Space National Guard succeed, units and capabilities will become ineffective. Enormous experience will be lost from the loss of personnel. The Department of Defense will then have to fund recruiting and training efforts for the Space Force to rebuild that capability. Those who oppose the Space National Guard leave out that this would cost taxpayers at [least \\$1 billion](#). Former President Trump, NGAUS, and all 50 state governors are correct; the Space National Guard should exist as the "primary combat reserve of the US Space Force."

National Defense Authorization Act language should not ignore the states and their governors. It is time to establish a Space National Guard.

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