



Richard Wrenn

National President

**Stop, and Reverse, the Conversion of National Guard Technicians
to Active Guard Reserve Members**

Congress has prohibited involuntary conversion of National Guard technicians to Active Guard Reserve (AGR) members:

Under no circumstances may a military technician (dual status) . . . be coerced by a State into accepting an offer of realignment or conversion to any other military status, including as a member of the Active, Guard, and Reserve program of a reserve component. If a military technician (dual status) declines to participate in such realignment or conversion, no further action will be taken against the individual or the individual's position.

Section 413(b) of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020, P.L. 116-92, 133 Stat. 1198, 1336 (Dec. 20, 2019).

In tension with this policy, however, Congress in recent years has reduced annual technician end strengths—the required minimum number of technicians as of the end of the fiscal year—while increasing AGR end strengths.¹ Thus, while prohibiting elimination of technician positions *after* their incumbents decline *offers* of conversion, Congress nonetheless has authorized Guard managers to make *initial* decisions eliminating technician positions and creating identical AGR positions; say these changes are due to end strength changes, not previous technician decisions declining conversion offers, no offers having been made; and inform technicians that they will be either separated or reassigned to another available technician position, if any exists; and that, while there is no offer of conversion, one of their options is to apply voluntarily to become an AGR and the application may be accepted. In such manner, the technician work force declines while AGR membership grows, without violation of the express terms of the involuntary conversion prohibition.

This erosion of the technician workforce should be reversed. Technicians can do everything that AGRs do (see our paper cited in n. 4, *infra*); and AGRs are far more expensive. After twenty years of service AGRs can retire at any age—such as 38. After the first twenty years of a forty-year period, taxpayers potentially must pay both the retired pay of the AGR who served during the first twenty years and also the salary of the AGR who replaces the retired AGR during the second twenty years. Further, the duration of the retired pay of both AGRs—potentially from age 38 to normal life expectancy—is far longer than that of technicians, who cannot reach normal retirement at such an early age.²

¹ Unlike technician end strengths, AGR end strengths are maximum limits rather than required minimums. Since fiscal year 2019 Congress, at the request of the Air National Guard (ANG) has reduced the ANG technician end strength by over 8,000 while increasing the ANG AGR end strength by almost 10,000. AGR end strengths now exceed technician end strengths. (FY 2024: 56,178 AGRs; 33,288 technicians).

² *See*, CNA, Report on the Termination of Military Technician as a Distinct Personnel Management Category (September 2013), Vol. 1, p. 2 (AGR retirement costs 34% higher than technician retirement costs due to earlier AGR retirement age).



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A technician workforce, moreover, is more efficient than an AGR workforce. When AGRs retire after twenty years, they are replaced by inexperienced AGRs—while experienced technicians who work until normal retirement, or even early retirement, continue to work after their first twenty years, creating a more stable, efficient workforce.

An AGR workforce is similar to a Regular Active Duty military unit, whose members also can retire at any age after twenty years. AGRs, moreover—like Regular military members who customarily move to different units every few years—can be recruited nationwide and therefore move more frequently than technicians, who normally spend their entire careers in the same State Guard. A 2008 Rand study found that stable, more experienced Guard technician maintenance units are far more productive than Active Duty units whose members are less experienced and move frequently to different units.³

Guard managers who prefer AGRs to technicians do so for irrational reasons, such as desire for a youthful force—appropriate for infantry, not maintenance units, the most common technician units; or erroneous belief that restrictions preclude technicians from doing what AGRs do.⁴ The Senate Armed Services Committee expressly found that the Air National Guard's (ANG's) implementation of its conversion of technicians to AGRs lacked “a rigorous and analytical process.”⁵ Our 2019 analysis quoted the ANG's own communications to show the conversion's irrationality and lack of credibility:

ANG communications during implementation of the conversion in Fiscal Year 2019, however, showed that the ANG's stated rationale for converting technicians to AGRs lacked credibility. Initially, the ANG claimed that it had identified specific technician positions that, supposedly, would be better performed by AGRs. The ANG directed the State Guards to select for conversion positions on the ANG's list—and expressly stated that this was necessary to ensure the conversion's credibility. But, when the Guards converted positions

³ RAND Project Air Force, Annual Report (2008) at 42, 44 (noting the “striking difference in productivity” between technician-majority ANG maintenance units and active-duty counterparts and that due to the greater experience and stability of technician units, they “meet the required standards for aircraft maintenance with a workforce that [is] about one-third the size of [an] active-duty counterpart”).

⁴ See M. Thiessen, Associated Press (Anchorage Alaska) April 17, 2024 (erroneously asserting without citation or evidence that technicians necessarily have “lower wages, less appealing benefits and different duties” than AGRs and quoting Guard commander's erroneous assertion, contrary to 32 U.S.C. § 709(h), that technicians cannot be ordered to work on weekends); Alaska Guard Operational Degradation (Undated Alaska Air National Guard Power Point document) (erroneously asserting that, unlike AGRs, technicians cannot involuntarily be ordered to perform missions in Title 10 military status); Association of Civilian Technicians, Response to Alaska Air National Guard Power Point Document “Alaska Guard Operational Degradation” (March 18, 2024, unpublished, available from lhackett@actnat.com) (refuting erroneous AKANG Power Point assertions).

⁵ S. Rep. 48, 116th Cong., 1st Sess. National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020 (S. 1790) (Committee on Armed Services June 11, 2019) at 152.

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that, for the most part, were not on the list, the ANG abandoned its initial direction and authorized the Guards to convert any positions they chose.

Association of Civilian Technicians, Conversion of Air National Guard (ANG) Technicians to Active Guard Reserve (AGR) Members Degrades Readiness; the 2019 Conversion Process Undermines ANG's Credibility and Rationale for Future Conversions (July 2019) (unpublished; available from lhackett@actnat.com) at 2-5.

There is no rational reason to convert technicians to AGRs, and conversion greatly increases costs and reduces efficiency—and therefore readiness. Congress should reverse the recent trend. Technician end strengths should be increased; AGR end strengths should be reduced.