



GOVERNMENT & POLITICS

Agency asks for funds for an Oklahoma militia

BY: **BARBARA HOBEROCK** - JANUARY 15, 2025 12:02 PM

📷 Adjutant General for Oklahoma Thomas Mancino stands at the Oklahoma State Awards Program at the state Capitol in Oklahoma City to present an award on Oct. 9, 2024. (Photo by Janelle Stecklein/Oklahoma Voice)

OKLAHOMA CITY – The Oklahoma Military Department is seeking \$2.4 million to start a state militia.

Maj. General Thomas H. Mancino, commander of the Oklahoma Army and Air National Guard, said Gov. Kevin Stitt suggested the idea.

“Gov. Stitt came to me this year after what he saw occurring on the border in Texas where they routinely use their state guard and asked me to take a look at reinstating that,” Mancino said.

A state guard is already allowable under law, but not funded, Mancino said.

Mancino’s remarks were made Tuesday to a Senate panel evaluating agency budgets.

“There are two types of militias within the state the Constitution looks for,” he said. “One is referred to as the regulated militia. That is me. That is the National Guard.”

There is also an unregulated militia, he said.

“When I say the word militia, I want to make sure we are not talking about the militias you see on the news, but these would be a state guard function,” he said.

Mancino said the group would be completely separate from the Oklahoma National Guard.

Sen. Regina Goodwin, D-Tulsa, said she had “more than great and grave reservations” about creating a state guard, adding that she was “almost appalled” it was put in the agency’s budget. She called the proposal “highly controversial.”

She questioned whether a state guard could be at odds with military units controlled by the federal government.

“When we talked about what they were doing in Texas, because what that resulted in was the federal government fighting against the state government, literally having a standoff, which is despicable,” she said.

Goodwin said Oklahoma does not have any border issues.

Stitt, a vocal critic of the President Joe Biden administration, in 2023 spent more than \$544,000 from a state disaster response fund to send members of the Oklahoma National Guard to Texas to assist with border security efforts.

The Oklahoma National Guard can be called into federal service by the president or state service by the governor. A state guard would be controlled by the governor.

Sen. Tom Woods, R-Westville, said such a force could be “a very valuable tool.” Woods serves in the Oklahoma Air National Guard.

He said the federal government overreaches on a wide variety of issues.

“Having an Oklahoma state guard that is answerable to our executive branch I think would be a valuable asset for the 4 million people in this state,” Woods said.

Goodwin asked what “threat” was being addressed by the creation of a state guard.

Mancino said he didn’t want to tie it to a threat, but said it would be an “opportunity.”

Should a large portion of the Oklahoma National Guard be called for a large-scale deployment, the state would still have a force to respond to disasters, he said.

In addition, it could support other state entities in the area of “drone and counter-drone in ways that I might be restricted to do under federal law.”

Mancino said other states have state guards, including California, which the Oklahoma program would be modeled after.

He anticipated it would involve paying about 250 personnel and would require training and equipment.

Mancino said he has not presented a formal plan to lawmakers or Stitt.

He said some members would be active duty retirees.

Abigail Cave, a spokeswoman for Stitt, did not respond to a request for comment.



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BARBARA HOBEROCK  

Barbara Hoberock is a senior reporter with Oklahoma Voice. She began her career in journalism in 1989 after graduating from Oklahoma State University. She began with the Claremore Daily Progress and then started working in 1990 for the Tulsa World. She has covered the statehouse since 1994 and served as Tulsa World Capitol Bureau chief. She covers statewide elected officials, the legislature, agencies, state issues, appellate courts and elections.

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