



# FY2026 NDAA: Reserve Component End-Strength

February 6, 2026

## Background

Under [10 U.S.C §115\(a\)](#) Congress sets the maximum size (i.e., end-strength) of the active and reserve components of the Armed Forces annually, typically in a National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). Congress is also responsible for appropriating funds for the pay and benefits of these personnel.

End-strength specifically refers to the actual number of personnel in a branch on the last day of the fiscal year (i.e., September 30). The enacted end-strength figures in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2026 (FY2026 NDAA; P.L. 119-60) are for September 30, 2026. Congress also periodically sets minimum end-strength levels for the Armed Forces, which may be identical to or lower than the authorized end-strength. While Congress authorizes minimum and maximum end-strengths, each military service manages its force, through recruiting and retention efforts, to achieve an actual end-strength.

Typically, this actual end-strength falls within the congressionally authorized minimum and maximum end-strengths. However, there are circumstances in which the actual end-strength may fall outside the authorized range. For example, under [10 U.S.C. §115\(f\)\(3\)](#), the Secretary of Defense (who is now using “Secretary of War” as a “secondary title” under [Executive Order 14347](#) dated September 5, 2025) may—after determining “such action is in the national interest”—increase the end-strength of any of the services above the authorized end-strength by up to 3%. Recruiting and retention shortfalls may cause one or more of the services to fall below their minimum authorized strength.

The reserve component provides “trained units and qualified persons available for active duty in the armed forces, in time of war or national emergency, and at such other times as the national security may require, to fill the needs of the armed forces whenever more units and persons are needed than are in the regular components.” (This provision is codified at [10. U.S.C. §10102](#)).

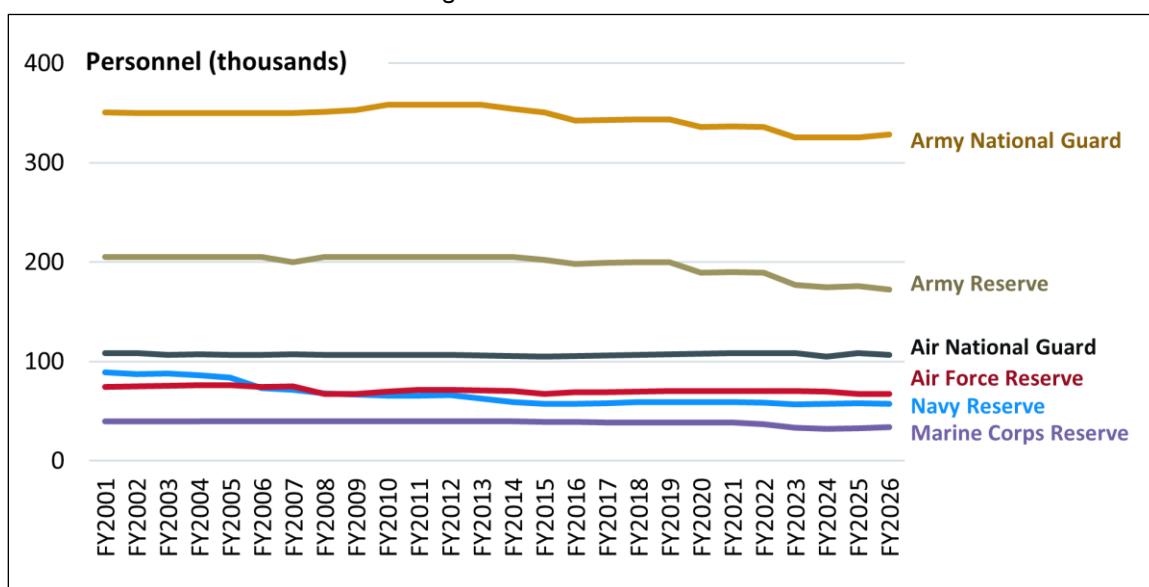
Under [10 U.S.C. §113a\(b\)\(2\)](#), the Secretary of Defense is required to submit end-strength requests for the reserve component in an annual budget request to Congress. Congress is not bound by these requests, but from FY2001 to FY2025 authorized end-strengths similar to the Pentagon’s requested numbers.

The reserve component consists of the federal reserve forces of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard, plus the Army National Guard (ARNG) and Air National Guard (ANG). The Space Force does not have a reserve component. It is a single-component armed service with personnel serving in an inactive or active-duty status ([10 U.S.C. §20001](#)). The National Guard (ANG and ARNG) may be mobilized under federal or state authority and performs homeland security missions that may include responding to civil unrest and [natural disasters](#) and guarding domestic airspace.

## End-Strength Trends, FY2001-FY2026

Congress has varied authorized end-strengths over time in response to factors such as national security priorities, budget constraints, and recruitment challenges. In the report (S.Rept. 118-58) accompanying the Senate-passed [National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024](#) (FY2024 NDAA, S. 2226 §411), the committee stated that it chose to recommend lower end-strengths than requested for the Selected Reserve because “legislating unreachable end strength numbers would set the military services up for failure” by “encouraging quantity over quality in recruiting.” It remains unclear whether incremental reductions in previous years may have stemmed in part from this concern.

**Figure 1. Selected Reserve Component Authorized End-Strength FY2001-FY2026**  
Figure is interactive in HTML.



**Source:** CRS analysis of Congress.gov for FY2001–FY2026 data. FY2025 data are from President’s Budget Request.

**Notes:** FY2001-FY2026 data comprise authorized end-strengths from NDAs. Coast Guard Reserve, part of the Department of Homeland Security, is not shown.

## FY2026 NDAA

**Table 1. FY2025 and FY2026 Reserve Component End-Strengths**

Service	FY2025 Enacted End-Strength	FY2026 President's Budget Request	FY2026 Enacted End-Strength	Changes from Enacted FY2025-FY2026
Army National Guard	325,000	328,000	328,000	+3,000
Army Reserve	175,800	172,000	172,000	-3,800
Air National Guard	108,300	106,300	106,300	-2,000
Air Force Reserve	67,000	67,500	67,500	+500
Navy Reserve	57,700	57,500	57,500	-200
Marine Corps Reserve	32,500	33,600	33,600	+1,100
<b>Total</b>	<b>776,300</b>	<b>764,900</b>	<b>764,900</b>	<b>-1,400</b>

**Source:** Congress.gov; Department of Defense (Department of War), Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller). Coast Guard Reserve, part of the Department of Homeland Security, is not shown.

On December 18, 2025, President Trump signed the FY2026 NDAA (P.L. 119-60) into law, enacting the end-strengths requested in his budget request (see **Table 1**).

## Issues for Congress

During FY2026, Congress may conduct oversight of the services' efforts to achieve enacted end-strengths.

As Congress considers a FY2027 NDAA, Congress may assess whether the Executive Branch's end-strength requests align with Congress's defense policy objectives.

Issues Congress may consider when evaluating reserve component end-strength requests include

- Do the reserve forces possess sufficient end-strength to fulfill all mission requirements—including domestic security and disaster relief activities?
- Do U.S. security objectives in Latin America and the Caribbean require adjustments to reserve component end-strengths?
- What is the role of the reserve components in service-level restructuring projects (such as the [Marine Corps Force Design Initiative](#), the [Army Transformation Initiative](#), or the Navy's "[Golden Fleet](#)")?
- Do these requests reflect a realistic assessment of the services' ability to [recruit](#) and [retain](#) personnel?

Congress may also decide to adjust the end-strengths of the reserve component for a range of reasons:

- Congress may assess that a different active component-reserve component (AC/RC) force mix would allow the Armed Forces to more effectively meet current defense objectives.
- Congress may identify additional defense objectives that the Armed Forces could better meet with a different AC/RC force mix.
- Congress may adjust the AC/RC force mix for cost-saving purposes.

- Congress may choose to shift certain assets, missions, or capabilities from the active to the reserve component (or vice-versa) and adjust end-strengths accordingly.

Congress may also choose to approve end-strengths that differ from or align with DOD requests.

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