



Legislative Update

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HOUSE VETERANS AFFAIRS, DISABILITY ASSISTANCE SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING ON VA RECORDS

On Tuesday, 4 December 2012, the House Veterans' Affairs Committee (HVA), Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs (DAMA), held a hearing titled: "Wading Through the Warehouses: The Challenges of Transitioning Veterans' Records to Paperless Technology." The witnesses included the Director of Department of Defense (DOD) and Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) Collaboration Office, Mr. Jeffery Hall, Director of the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) for the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Mr. Scott Levins, Director of Veterans' Benefits Management System (VBMS) for the Veterans' Benefits Administration (VBA) of the VA, Mr. Alan Bozeman and several spokesmen for various veteran service organizations (VSO's).

HVA-DAMA Chairman, Representative Jon Runyan (R-NJ-03) and Ranking Member, Representative Jerry McNerney (D-CA-11), both opened the hearing by voicing their growing concerns over how long it's taking disabled veterans to get the benefits they need, specifically the benefits claims process and the role a veterans' records plays in that process. The general consensus, throughout the ranks of the VSO community, government and Congressional leaders, is that while the benefits claims process for disabled veterans has always been a long and arduous process, the fact that many of the 1.5 million servicemembers slated to transition out of the military ranks in the next five years will go through this very process, requires immediate action to streamline and simplify it and to significantly reduce the backlog of claims.

Mr. Hall testified that DOD has been creating electronic records for entering servicemembers since 2006, and that he is already starting to see the difference this is making. His belief is that with more time the benefits claims process will be positively affected by this as well. Mr. Bozeman agreed that in time the 2006 DOD changes will have a positive effect on the benefits claims process and that combining personnel and medical records would also help streamline the process. There was talk between the Committee members and witnesses of the importance of combining personnel and medical records, but no decision was made, and the committee decided to "table" the conversation, however voiced an interest in exploring that option down the road.

Also part of the hearing discussion was the scanning of old and archived records, to turn them into electronic files. VSO leadership voiced concerns over the VA not having the right tools or personnel to do this, and Mr. Bozeman agreed and testified that while the VA doesn't have the tools nor desire to become a, "scanning agency," he is confident that the two outsourced scanning companies the VA chose will suffice, and that once the scanning is done they will not need that capability, because DOD records are now electronic from their inception.

SENATE PASSES NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT (NDAA)

In the late evening of 4 December 2012, the Senate voted 98-0 to approve [S. 3254](#), the Fiscal Year 2013 (FY13) National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). Of the \$631.4 billion measure, \$525.8 billion is for the base budget of the Department of Defense (DOD), \$88.2 billion for Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) and \$17.4 for Department of Energy and other national security

programs related to nuclear safety. The House version of FY13 NDAA, in the form of [H.R. 4310](#), passed last May and authorized a total of \$635.3 billion, which is \$4 billion more than the President's Budget Request and \$8 billion more than what was called for under the Budget Control Act (BCA) of 2011 with the now infamous 'sequestration' clause ([P.L. 112-25](#)).

Over the past week, AUSN had been carefully monitoring the Senate debate on the NDAA (see [AUSN Capitol Hill Blog on NDAA Amendments that were tracked](#)). The vote to approve the Senate's version of the FY13 NDAA sets up a very quick conference process with the House to write a final version to send to President Obama before the end of the year. Late last week, the President's aides issued a very detailed veto threat expressing concern if the legislation contains any of a long list of controversial provisions. These Administration concerns in NDAA provisions range from restrictions on the disposition of detainees at Guantanamo Bay to a ban on spending money on the Medium Extended Air Defense antimissile program that the U.S. Army's developing with Germany and Italy. In addition, are concerns on the TRICARE enrollment fee changes Congress made (eliminating the Administration's fee proposals) as well as the Congresses desire to add the Virginia Class Submarine authorization back into Fiscal Year 2014 (FY14) and procurement of additional F/A-18 E/F 'Super Hornets' to make up for F-35 procurement delays. All of these items were sought after by AUSN as we worked tirelessly to obtain these to improve the lives of our current and former Sailors.

Details can be found by visiting [AUSN's Capitol Hill Blog on Senate NDAA Passage](#).

AUSN JOINS OTHER VSO'S IN PUSHING VITAL NDAA PROVISIONS IN CONFERENCE TALKS

AUSN had been closely monitoring the progress of Senate Amendment 3017 to S. 3254, the FY13 NDAA this past week; however it never received consideration due to the opposition by a few Senators. The amendment was co-authored by Senators Jack Reed (D-RI), Marco Rubio (R-FL), and Claire McCaskill (D-MO) and mirrored the House-passed provision in their version of the FY13 NDAA, H.R. 4310, that was designed cooperatively with many other multiple military associations, such as AUSN. The amendment's goal was a compromise of both curbing growing healthcare costs as well as preventing a tremendous jump in individual pharmacy copay costs for service members and their families.

AUSN has already taken multiple steps to advocate the passage of this amendment such as writing a legislative alert, [Legislative Alert #112-23](#), which calls upon the Senate and eventual conferees to address this vital part of TRICARE that many servicemembers, veterans and families rely on. The Military Coalition (TMC), which AUSN is a member of, recently submitted [letters of concern on behalf of TMC Members](#) to the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) and Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC), requesting that conferees keep, amongst many pending concerns, TRICARE Pharmacy Copay language of the House preserved in the final product of the FY13 NDAA.

Details can be found by visiting [AUSN's Capitol Hill Blog on TRICARE Pharmacy Amendment](#).

AUSN ON THE HILL

This week, much of AUSN's Capitol Hill work focused primarily on monitoring the passage of the NDAA and preparing for forthcoming conference negotiations. No meetings with staff offices were held, however AUSN did meet with a few industry representatives to get information regarding platforms as well as with the Navy's Office of Legislative Affairs (Navy-OLA) to make sure that messaging and information is correct as AUSN puts together its Fiscal Year 2014 Legislative Objectives in the coming weeks. These Legislative Objectives are a direct product of AUSN's National Resolutions, which can be found on the [Resolutions section of the website here](#), that are passed every year at our National Conference.

PRIORITY BILLS INTRODUCED THIS WEEK

H.R. 6635, (Bill text not available yet). Introduced by Representative Greg Walden (R-OR-02), the bill would direct the Secretary of Defense to submit a report to Congress on the future availability of TRICARE Prime throughout the United States and to ensure that certain TRICARE beneficiaries retain access to a primary care provider.

H.R. 6627, (Bill text not available yet). Introduced by Representative Jim Langevin (D-RI-02), the bill would amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to allow a credit for veteran first-time homebuyers and for adaptive housing and mobility improvements for disabled veterans.

In the advocacy section of the website, you can click on [Bills of Interest](#) to get daily revisions on Congressional action for priority bills. I STRONGLY encourage you all to visit our [Advocacy](#) page, especially the [Capitol Hill Blog](#) which receives almost daily

submissions when Congress is in session to see what AUSN is doing for you on Capitol Hill.

We also encourage you and your friends and family to visit the re-designed [AUSN FACEBOOK PAGE](#). If you have an account, please Login and “Like” us, which will allow you to see our [TWITTER](#) feeds and other updates from AUSN that shows us monitoring Capitol Hill on your behalf!

NEW LEGISLATIVE ALERTS

There was one new Legislative Alerts sent this past week (and month) based on hearings and interaction with Congressional staff, as well as traction on the issue. When these alerts are sent to your email, please click on the TAKE ACTION link that is at the top of the alert email to send a letter response to your Members of Congress. If you have not seen them, please go to the [Legislative Alerts](#) section on the AUSN webpage and/or check your e-mail for the following alerts which were titled:

Legislative Alert #112-24: URGE Senate to Adopt AUSN Priority Amendments Pending Floor Consideration

NEXT WEEK OUTLOOK

Next week, Congress is expected to hold and finalize Conference negotiations with the House and Senate, resolving differences in the two versions passed by each chamber of the FY13 NDAA. Upon adoption in each chamber of the FY13 NDAA, and pending the lift of the veto threat by the White House, the NDAA should be sent to the President hopefully by the end of next week. In addition, AUSN will have a meeting with Senator Jon Tester (D-MT), who is in the running along with Senator’s Sherrod Brown (D-OH) and Bernie Sanders (I-VT) to succeed Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) who is vacating her seat as Chairman of the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee. All the while, a ‘Fiscal-Cliff’ deal is being negotiated on Capitol Hill with a recent softening by Congressional Republicans on tax increases; however a few Democrats are asking for continued unemployment extensions as part of a negotiated compromise, something the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) is scoring at roughly a price tag of \$30 billion a year. Nevertheless, even though approaching a close consensus on the issue, a bi-partisan deal and details are still being worked out as the clock winds down on the 112th Congress.

AUSN LEGISLATIVE DEPARTMENT SEEKING LEGISLATIVE INTERNS FOR 2013

AUSN is looking for unpaid Legislative Interns to start as early as mid-January 2013 and continue throughout the spring. Candidates should have, or be pursuing, a degree in Political Science/ Government Affairs or Communications. Strong writing and personal skills a must as well as an interest and passion for the United States Navy and Navy Reserve.

In addition to administrative tasks, i.e. answering phones and helping to schedule appointments, interns will monitor and write After Action Reports on Congressional Hearings of interest such as House and Senate Armed Services, Appropriations and Veterans’ Affairs Committee hearings. Interns will also have the opportunity to attend meetings with Congressional Staff along with the Legislative Director as well as other meetings off of Capitol Hill. The Legislative Director is also willing to oversee a research project of the intern’s interest if they are pursuing class credit for the internship.

Candidates can submit a cover letter, resume and 1-2 page writing sample to the Director of Legislation, Mr. Anthony A. Wallis at Anthony.Wallis@ausn.org or fax it to 703-683-3647 by December 10. Schedules are flexible/negotiable and Metrorail travel reimbursement is available to interns as well as free parking at our headquarters off of King Street in Alexandria. Further details can be found at [AUSN’s Legislative Intern webpage](#).

AUSN LEGISLATIVE DEPARTMENT SEEKING LEGISLATIVE LIAISON VOLUNTEERS FOR 2013

AUSN is seeking TWO VOLUNTEER AUSN MEMBERS per state to act as AUSN Legislative Liaisons and meet with their Members of Congress AT LEAST TWICE a year, preferably once in the late Spring and once in the early Fall. The goal will be to have AUSN Members engage their Congressional Delegation and report to the Legislative Director at the AUSN Headquarters on what transpired and what they need. AUSN Headquarters will provide necessary copies of Legislative Alerts, Fact Sheets, Priorities/Objectives Cards and any other information in preparation for meetings upon request.

To qualify for being a 2013 AUSN Legislative Liaison, you must;

- Be an Active AUSN Member (and be a permanent resident of State you wish to liaison with)
- Be willing to meet with your Senators’ offices TWICE a year (which have District offices throughout your State)
- Be willing to engage with at least ONE House Member District office TWICE a year

- Report to AUSN Legislative Director, Anthony Wallis, and/or the NEW National Vice President of Government Relations, RDML Robin Graf, USNR (Ret), on meetings and important highlights via e-mail
- Stick STRICTLY to FEDERAL issues of concern (AUSN Priority Card) to AUSN that are nation-wide and benefit all members of the Navy community

IF INTERESTED, please contact AUSN'S Legislative Director, Anthony Wallis, at anthony.wallis@ausn.org and copy RDML Graf, at grafrl@cox.net. Once we have enough AUSN Volunteers (two from each State) we will notify you with further instructions before the end of the year/early January 2013.

The Association of the United States Navy is continuously on and/or monitoring Capitol Hill, advocating for your concerns and utilizing our strong relationships with Members of Congress, Staff and cooperating with other military associations to tell the Navy and our veterans' story. This is an ALL HANDS ON DECK effort and your grassroots advocacy will help make the changes that need to happen!

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS/CONCERNS

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Legislative Action Center: [Contact Congress](#)