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### **AUSN LOOKS AT DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS SERVICES DURING SHUTDOWN**

AUSN received a contingency plan report on services that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will or will not be continuing to provide at the start of the Government Shutdown on 1 October 2013. The VA has stated in its report that it is pursuing a comprehensive approach for a potential shutdown, which includes identifying functions and programs for which there is a legal basis for exception, including those required by "necessary implication" and protection of life and property. VA Administration's and Staff Offices were asked to review their organizations and identify specific functions and programs (and the employees required to support them). Their decisions were based on long-standing Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and Justice Department guidance, and the legal opinions of the VA's Office of General Counsel (OGC).

Overall, the report highlights that the VA will pay certain disability compensation, pension, survivor, education and other entitlement program benefits during a short-term shutdown. In regards to advance medical care funding, the VA's ongoing medical care will continue to be provided during a shutdown and very few VA employees are expected to be furloughed due to advanced appropriations being allocated for their services. However, on the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) side, the shutdown of the Federal government pain will be felt immediately. The VBA identifies some of the following activities that would be suspended including: Overseas Military Coordinator programs; All Outreach; Education Call Centers; All Public Contact Activities; Claims Appeals Teams; Transition Assistance/Pre-discharge Activities; Chapter 36 Counseling; Vet Success on Campus; Education Compliance; Quality Review/Assurance Programs and overtime for VA Claims processing to eliminate the backlog.

Details can be found at [AUSN's Capitol Hill Blog on VA Services during Shutdown](#).

### **HOUSE ARMED SERVICES, READINESS SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING ON SEQUESTRATION**

On 2 October 2013, the House Armed Services Committee (HASC), Subcommittee on Readiness, held a hearing titled, "Resetting the Force for the Future: Risks of Sequestration." The witnesses present were Lieutenant William M. Faulkner, Deputy Commandant Installations and Logistics, U.S. Marine Corps and Lieutenant General Raymond V. Mason, Deputy Chief of Staff for Logistics, US Army. HASC Readiness Subcommittee Chairman, Representative Robert Wittman (R-VA-01) and HASC Readiness Subcommittee Ranking Member, Delegate Madeleine Z. Bordallo (D-GU), presided over the hearing.

The hearing began with opening remarks made by the Chairman, the Ranking Member, and the two witnesses. Chairman Wittman began by stating that the United States is reducing its military's capabilities after almost 13 years of combat. He added that the military has been forced to repair old equipment instead of replacing when appropriate. He further mentioned that the Reserve forces may be in jeopardy if sequestration continues; citing that the Army has had reductions of 72,000 personnel and the Marine Corps has faced reductions of 20,000 personnel. Ranking Member Bordallo warned that sequestration is damaging to our nation's readiness requirements. She noted that thousands of our current assets are being used beyond expected service life and voiced concern about the strategy of future conflicts if sequestration continues. Lt. Gen. Mason explained that having our military in transition, as we currently do, leads to decreased capability in conflict. He also stressed that during conflict, the strategy is not always predictable and that sequestration makes it difficult to adjust to those needs, citing that while we currently have a 90% readiness rate in theater, that number is much lower for readiness of non-deployed units. Lt. Gen. Faulkner began by reminding the subcommittee that continued

sequestration will be at the expense of long term readiness. He mentioned that with rising cost, it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain current readiness levels. He finished by stating that the Marine Corps is currently utilizing 39,000 pieces of retrograde equipment and having to reset one-third of the items for Afghanistan.

Following these opening remarks Chairman Wittman deferred to the Subcommittee members for questioning and comments. The Chairman inquired first about the key effects of sequestration. Lt. Gen. Mason responded that the biggest effect would be on the workforce, mentioning that many civilian workers have been furloughed due to the sequestration and government shutdown. He added that equipment, weapons, gear, and platforms would also be affected as new acquisitions would be postponed and repairs would be delayed. Ranking Member Bordallo asked about the strategy for a complete reset. Lt. Gen. Faulkner emphasized that any changes would come from the base budget as that is the only money which they have some flexibility with. However, he reminded the Subcommittee members that this is the reason that there are currently repair backups at maintenance depots. Lt. Gen. Mason also added that due to the sequestration, our overall readiness across all the services is continually eroding, leaving us unprepared for future, and unexpected, challenges and missions.

### **AUSN LOOKS AT WHERE THINGS STAND WITH GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN**

In the past week, the Association of the United States Navy (AUSN) has been closely monitoring the developments surrounding the Continuing Resolution (CR) debate on funding the Federal government for the first few months of Fiscal Year 2014 (FY14). As a result of failed negotiations by Monday, 30 September 2013, the shutdown of the Federal government began in the early morning of 1 October 2013 when the House and Senate both failed to agree and pass a stopgap spending CR for FY14. This was due primarily to disagreements over funding of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), with the Senate insisting on a clean CR, and the House attempting to make various changes, funding and/or implementation, to the ACA. Shutdown activities began to take place on Tuesday, leaving many Federal agencies operating at minimum capacity, closure of National Parks and the suspension of many other Federal services.

The Department of Defense (DOD) has already furloughed about half of the 16,000 civilian workers at the Pentagon, though the President earlier this week signed the Pay our Military Act, authorizing continued on-time pay for servicemembers during the shutdown. Additionally, military bases have begun to see the impacts of the shutdown, with some commissary stocks like meat being closed down, as well as the closing of base education centers and the potential halting of certain tuition assistance payments. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has said that its most utilized programs will be able to continue unaffected for an unspecified amount of time as the shutdown progresses. However, the VA has also told Congress that they will likely not have the money to continue to pay disability claims or pension payments if the shutdown lasts longer than two or three weeks.

As of right now, it appears that Congressional leadership are looking at a multi-pronged approach whereby the current CR debate may be rolled into a larger debt-ceiling, since the U.S. defaults on loans/borrowing authority in mid-October, as well as a sequestration debate. This 'grand bargain' being referenced currently appears to be illusive, but is certainly being discussed amongst lawmakers on Capitol Hill. AUSN will continue to monitor these developments.

Details can be found at [AUSN's Capitol Hill Blog on where Government Shutdown currently stands.](#)

### **AUSN ON THE HILL**

With the Federal government shutdown, effective as of 1 October 2013, this week, AUSN had to navigate through limited access to Congressional building for various meetings this week. In addition to monitoring what few hearings were occurring as well as the ongoing shutdown debate, AUSN's Legislative Director and Executive Director, VADM John Totushek, USN (Ret.), met personally with Representative J. Randy Forbes (R-VA-04) who chairs the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Seapower, Representative Jeff Miller (R-FL-01) who chairs the House Veterans' Affairs Committee (HVAC), Representative Howard 'Buck' McKeon (R-CA-25) who chairs the full House Armed Services Committee (HASC), and Representative Jim Bridenstine (R-OK-01) who serves on HASC and was a Navy F-18 Hornet and E-2C Hawkeye pilot. In all the meetings, the subject of the shutdown and sequestration were discussed and how devastating to the future readiness of our Armed Services these outcomes will be and how AUSN is willing and able to help with their initiatives. In addition, AUSN had a great meeting with senior staff of the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) to discuss future amendments to be considered during the Senate's floor debate which is expected to occur in early November at the very earliest.

### **PRIORITY BILLS INTRODUCED THIS WEEK**

**S. 1564, The Protecting Those Who Protected Us Act of 2013.** Introduced by Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT), the bill would make continuing appropriations for Veterans benefits and services in the event of a Government shutdown.

**S. 1558, (Official title yet to be released).** Introduced by Senator Mark Begich (D-AK), the bill would require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a program of outreach for Veterans.

**H.R. 3241, Pay Our Guardsmen and Civilian Defense Personnel Act.** Introduced by Representative Austin Scott (R-GA-08), the bill would amend the Pay Our Military Act to provide for continuing appropriations for defense civilian personnel (including military technicians (dual status)) and members of the Reserve Components of the Armed Forces performing inactive-duty training.

**H.R. 3225, The Save Our Veterans Act.** Introduced by Representative Matt Salmon (R-AZ-05), the bill would make continuing appropriations for Veterans benefits and services in the event of a Government shutdown.

In the advocacy section of the website, you can click on [Bills of Interest](#) to get daily revisions on Congressional action for all AUSN priority bills. We 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 [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 week 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 #113-20: SUPPORT H.R. 2907, National Guard and Reservists Parity for Patriots Act**

#### **NEXT WEEK OUTLOOK**

Despite the ongoing uncertainty around the shutdown of the Federal government, there are quite a few Congressional hearings being held next week. The Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) will be holding a hearing where the Service Chiefs are expected to testify about the long term consequences of sequestration. In addition, a Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee hearing will take place to hear on the progress of VA claims. The House Veterans’ Affairs Committee (HVAC) will also hold a hearing on the use of certain prescription drugs to Veterans and the House Armed Services Committee (HASC), Seapower and Projection Forces Subcommittee will hold a hearing on the future of Sea/Air battle strategies by the Department of Defense (DOD). AUSN will also be meeting with officials from the Department of Veterans Affairs to discuss what some of this budget uncertainty means for future initiatives and efforts of the VA. Also, AUSN’s Legislative Director will be hosting a live Q&A session on [AUSN’s Facebook page](#) on 10 October 2013 at 1400ET to answer any of our members and followers questions regarding the shutdown, sequestration and future of our Navy and Veteran benefits. Lastly, AUSN is currently working with WUSA Channel 9 News to be interviewed next week regarding the impact that the government shutdown is having upon the Navy and Veterans.

#### **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS/CONCERNS**

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