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AUSN ANALYZES HOUSE PASSED FY15 MILCON/VA BILL

*On 30 April 2014, the U.S. House of Representatives approved the Military Construction & Veterans Affairs (MILCON/VA) Appropriations bill for Fiscal Year 2015 (FY15). The bill, in the form of H.R. 4486, passed on a nearly unanimous 416-1 vote. The bill contains funding to help train and equip our troops, provide housing and services to military personnel and their families, maintain base infrastructure, and fund Veterans' benefits and programs. In total, the legislation provides **\$71.5 billion** in discretionary funding, a cut of **\$1.8 billion** below the Fiscal Year 2014 (FY14) level and **\$398 million** below the FY15 President's Budget (PB) request. The House Appropriations Committee (HAC) reported in its press release that this reduction would not negatively affect projects or services on which our troops and Veterans rely. Rather, the bill provides less funding than the previous year for military construction, largely due to a lack of new need for such projects, while increasing funding for Veterans programs by **\$1.5 billion**.*

FURTHER READING:

During House floor debate, the House adopted on a voice vote the following amendments to be included in the final version of the bill: An amendment by Representative Sinema (D-AZ-09) that would transfer **\$1 million** from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Departmental Administration account to the VA Inspector General for the purposes of investigating alleged misconduct at the Phoenix, Arizona, VA hospital; An amendment by Representative Costa (D-CA-16) that would increase funding to address the VA disability claims backlog by **\$10 million**, offset by a reduction in the Departmental Administration account by **\$10.5 million**; An amendment by Representative Ross (R-FL-15) that prohibits funding for the Department of Defense (DOD) to close any military commissary; An amendment by Representative Gosar (R-AZ-04) that would prohibit funding for any patient record-keeping system other than those currently approved by the VA Central Office in Washington, D.C.; An amendment by Representative Jon Runyan (R-NJ-03) that prohibits funding for a new Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) round; An amendment by Representative Gosar (R-AZ-04) that increases the VA Information Technology account by **\$3.2 million**, offset by a reduction in the VA General Administration account. The amendment is intended to help continue to reduce the VA claims backlog.

H.R. 4486, Title I, contains **\$998.8 million** for Navy and Marine Corps MILCON for FY15. The President's Budget (PB) request includes **\$1 billion** for Navy and Marine Corps MILCON. This is a decrease of **\$20 million** from the FY15 PB request (a 2% decrease). H.R. 4486, Title I, contains **\$51.5 million** for Navy and Marine Corps Reserve MILCON for FY15, which fully funds the FY15 PB request. H.R. 4486, which contains funding to train and equip our troops,

provide housing and services to military personnel and their families, help maintain base infrastructure, and fund Veteran benefits and programs, now heads to the Senate for conference, when the Senate finishes its markup of the FY15 MILCON/VA Appropriations bill.

For more details, see [AUSN's Analysis of FY15 House Passed MILCON/VA Bill](#).

AUSN TESTIFIES BEFORE SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE ON MILITARY COMPENSATION

On 6 May 2014, the Association of the United States Navy (AUSN) testified before the full Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC), on military compensation proposals and impact upon the Navy and military community. AUSN was joined by representatives of the Association of the United States Army (AUSA), the Air Force Association (AFA) and the Military Officers Association of America (MOA)), after the Joint Chiefs of Staff testified on the first panel, including the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), Admiral (ADM) Jonathan Greenert, USN. AUSN's Executive Director, VADM John B. Totushek, USN (Ret), in his opening statement presented the results of a survey AUSN conducted during the month of April of AUSN members and those within the larger Navy and military community. Of those respondents, over 90% were concerned with one or all of the proposals (see chart) and VADM Totushek cited one Active Duty Sailor who stated, "The cost of living is not going down in our area. Yet DOD has made a decision to knock down the BAH for Hampton Roads."

FURTHER READING:

SASC Ranking Member, Senator James Inhofe (R-OK), after witness opening statements, noted that, Congress got itself into this mess because here we are, 16 percent of the Federal budget, the Department of Defense (DOD), having to take 50 percent of the budget cuts. That's the problem that we've got. A strong national defense, he said, requires modernization, training and readiness and that's where we're not keeping up. In addition, he noted that we have this Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission (MCRMC) that's supposed to report back February of 2015 and that it might be a little presumptuous to try to do something in this year's NDAA that would, or even could constrain the Commission with the recommendations that they're studying. He warned that the Fiscal Year 2015 (FY15) President's Budget (PB) proposals might undo something, or undo what Congress has done, in regards to the MCRMC's anticipated recommendations. Live video of the full hearing can be found on [SASC's Military Compensation Hearing webpage](#).

In his closing statement, VADM Totushek said, "I would tell you also that sequestration... makes big impacts to our readiness, to our force structure and to our training, but it also has an impact on Navy families because, as CNO said, we are now forced into longer cruises and when we retain people, we don't retain just that service person. We retain the family, and the families will vote with their feet.

For more details, see [AUSN's Submitted Written Testimony before SASC](#).

AUSN ANALYZES HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE FY15 NDAA MARKUP

*On 8 May 2014, the House Armed Services Committee (HASC), very early in the morning, completed its markup and passed H.R. 4435, the Fiscal Year 2015 (FY15) National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) by a vote of 61-0, sending the bill for House floor consideration. Overall, the legislation authorizes **\$521.3 billion** in national defense funding, in accordance with the December passed Bipartisan Budget Act (BBA) of 2013, (P.L. 113-67), and would authorize for **\$79.4 billion** for Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO). The markup rejects Pentagon proposals to "slow the growth", according to DOD, of personnel costs, including rejecting the changes to TRICARE, the proposed Consolidated TRICARE plan. The Chairman's mark also supports current law, which mandates an automatic 1.8% annual increase in troop pay, which the FY15 PB requested a reduction down to 1%. However, the markup does state that the President retains his Executive authority to make reductions to this pay rate without Congressional authorization. In addition, the markup provided **\$796 million** in added authorized funding for the Refueling and Complex Overhaul (RCOH) of the USS George Washington (CVN-73).*

FURTHER READING:

Included in the HASC Passed FY15 NDAA were items proposed in the Chairman's markup (Full Committee Chairman's markup and summary attached as PDFs). Overall, the Chairman's mark rejected the Administration's

request for an additional round of Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC), whereby they stated that the Committee maintains the long held concern that BRAC rounds do not yield true savings, but rather impose large up-front costs only then to shift property between Federal agencies. The markup also cited that an additional BRAC round would be inappropriate at a time when the final size of the military and structure needed to support it is still in flux. Furthermore, the markup rejects Pentagon proposals to “slow the growth”, according to DOD, of personnel costs, including rejecting the changes to TRICARE, the proposed Consolidated TRICARE plan. The Chairman’s mark also supports current law, which mandates an automatic 1.8% annual increase in troop pay, which the FY15 PB requested a reduction down to 1%. However, the markup does state that the President retains his Executive authority to make reductions to this pay rate without Congressional authorization. Finally, in regards to the Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) and Commissary subsidy proposals in the FY15 PB, the Chairman’s mark categorically rejects these cuts where the Committee states it believes that military compensation reform should be addressed and informed by the recommendations of the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission (MCRMC), established by the Fiscal Year 2013 (FY13) NDAA, scheduled to give its final report in February of 2015.

Notable increase and decreases in equipment funding include; **\$450 million** added for 5 additional E/A-18G “Growler” aircraft, a reduction of **\$53.4 million** for MH-60R from multi-year procurement (MYP) in order to help with carrier Refueling and Complex Overhaul (RCOH), **\$82 million** added for 93 additional Tomahawk missiles (increasing funding from the FY15 PB request of **\$194 million to \$276 million**), **\$796 million** added for RCOH of the USS *George Washington* (CVN-73), a reduction of **\$54 million** from the DDG-1000 program, a reduction of **\$450 million** from the LCS program (reducing the FY15 PB ask of 3 down to 2 LCS), **\$800 million** added for incremental funding for Amphibious Assault Ships (particularly LPD-28), a reduction of **\$220 million** for the Moored Training Ship (reducing the FY15 PB ask of **\$737 million** down to \$517 million), **\$88.4 million** added for C-130 programs and a reduction of **\$203 million**, due to a decision to delay the program, for Unmanned Carrier Launched Airborne Surveillance (UCLASS) systems (reducing the FY15PB ask of **\$403 million** down to **\$200 million**).

For more details, see [AUSN’s Capitol Hill Blog on HASC FY15 NDAA Markup](#).

HOUSE VETERANS AFFAIRS, ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING ON STUDENT VETERANS

On 8 May 2014, the House Veterans Affairs Committee (HVAC), Economic Opportunity Subcommittee held a hearing on current success rates of student Veterans in the wake of the Post-9/11 GI Bill and how to improve enrollment, graduation and employment rates. The hearing was presided over by HVAC, Economic Opportunity Subcommittee Chairman, Representative Bill Flores (R-TX-17), and HVAC, Economic Opportunity Subcommittee Ranking Member, Representative Mark Takano (D-CA-41). There were two panels that testified. The first panel of witnesses consisted of Mr. Michael Dakduk, Vice President of Military and Veterans Affairs, Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities (APSCU); Mr. William Hubbard, Vice President of External Affairs, Student Veterans of America (SVA); Mr. Ricardo D. Torres, President and CEO, The National Student Clearinghouse; Mr. Thomas W. Ross, President, The University of North Carolina System; Dr. Melissa Vito, Senior Vice President for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management and Vice Provost for Academic Initiatives and Student Success, the University of Arizona. The second panel of witnesses consisted of Mr. Curtis L. Coy, Deputy Undersecretary for Economic Opportunity at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). In his opening statement, Ranking Member Takano stressed the need to make information about colleges and universities available to Veterans. He described a bill, H.R. 4248: The Veterans Education Outcomes Act, which he is spearheading to facilitate the release of information about rates of retention, employment and others for student Veterans.

FURTHER READING (*Full AUSN Transcripts & After Action Reports (AARs) available upon request*):

In the opening statements by the witnesses, Mr. Dakduk noted that over 325,000 Veterans attended member schools of his organization at a 52 percent completion rate. He stressed that studies show that Veterans complete school at a rate equal to or higher than their peers. Mr. Hubbard went on to state that the goals of the SVA were to improve the rates of gainful employment for veterans while decreasing the frequency of student veterans having to incur loans to pay for school. He denounced the idea that Veterans get “free rides” to college by explaining that their circumstances often required them to take extra years to finish their degrees. In his opening statement, Mr. Ross stated that the University of North Carolina school system was very supportive of extending in-state tuition to Veterans and their families. Finally, Dr. Vito explained the various student veteran services at the University of Arizona, claiming that the main campus’s Veterans Center had received 10,000 visits in the fall of 2013 alone.

Chairman Flores opened the round of questioning by asking about the Veterans Affairs Comparison Tool. Mr. Dakduk replied that his organization was a fan of the tool, but it should continue to be updated. Mr. Torres also agreed that the tool was “break-through,” but that it would be more helpful if it also took into account the individual veteran’s entitlement at each prospective university and how much had been used already. Ranking Member Takano asked Mr. Dakduk about the for-profit university sector and the transferability of credits. He replied that his member institutions were all recognized by the Department of Education and more discussion should be made with non-profit state and private universities to discover why they were not accepting credits from for-profit institutions.

Representative Julia Brownley (D-CA-26) asked Mr. Ross which Veterans would be eligible for in-state tuition under his proposal. He said that he was currently working with State Legislature to determine the details, but that in the long-term, offering in-state tuition for Veterans would yield a return for the state. Dr. Vito added that in Arizona, the University required an in-state lease agreement among a few other things. Chairman Flores then asked Undersecretary Coy about the VA Career Scope tool. Mr. Coy replied that the site had over 10,000 users and had compiled data from over 23 different sites to use in one tool. Representative Dina Titus (D-NV-01) asked about cooperation between the VA and other parties and their programs. Undersecretary Coy replied that the VA worked very closely with the Department of Labor (DOL) on their Veteran Employment Center.

AUSN ON THE HILL

This week, in addition to testifying before the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC), monitoring the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) markup of the Fiscal Year 2015 (FY15) National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), and analyzing the House passed FY15 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs (MILCON/VA) Appropriations bill, AUSN was quite busy. AUSN spent a good amount of the week answering inquiries from Congressional staff and press on the items we spoke about before the SASC hearing on military compensation. In addition, AUSN held its second Navy Now Forum with LtGen Robert Schmidle, USMC, who is the Principal Deputy Director for Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation (CAPE) where he spoke about acquisition and procurement of F-35 and V-22 ‘Osprey’ aircraft. Finally, AUSN attended a reception where Representative Duncan Hunter (R-CA-50) was being honored by the American Maritime Congress (AMC).

PRIORITY BILLS INTRODUCED THIS WEEK

S. 2300, Jacob Sexton Military Suicide Prevention Act of 2014. Introduced by Senator Joe Donnelly (D-IN), the bill would amend Title 10, United States Code, to require the Secretary of Defense to conduct periodic mental health assessments for members of the Armed Forces and to submit reports with respect to mental health.

S. 2294, Servicemembers Compensation Empowerment Act of 2014. Introduced by Senator Tim Kaine (D-VA), the bill would require a survey of the preferences of members of the Armed Forces regarding military pay and benefits.

H.R. 4616, (Official title yet to be released). Introduced by Representative Beto O’Rourke (D-TX-17), the bill would direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a pilot program to provide Veterans the option of using an alternative appeals process to more quickly determine claims for disability compensation.

H.R. 4579, (Official title yet to be released). Introduced by Representative Matt Salmon (R-AZ-05), the bill would require the Secretary of Education to verify that individuals have made a commitment to serve in the Armed Forces or in public service, or otherwise are a borrower on an eligible loan which has been submitted to a guaranty agency for default aversion or is already in default, before such individuals obtain a consolidation loan for purposes specified under Section 455(o) of the Higher Education Act of 1965.

H.R. 4559, Strengthening Mental Health in Our Communities Act of 2014. Introduced by Representative Ron Barber (D-AZ-02), the bill would maximize the access of individuals with mental illness to community-based services, to strengthen the impact of such services.

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 were no new legislative alerts this week. 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 (a few of you have written in that you wish to send letters, but don't know how). Please continue to go to the [Legislative Alerts](#) section on the AUSN webpage and/or check your e-mail and submit ones you haven't seen yet to your Congressional delegation.

NEXT WEEK OUTLOOK

Next week, the House will be in Congressional recess, but the Senate will be in session. If there is much work/traction being done in the Senate, there will be a Legislative Watch, but if not, there won't be until the week of May 19th. On the other hand, AUSN does have a few notable meetings and events next week including a meeting with staff of the Navy Office of Legislative Affairs, meeting with a Littoral Combat Ship supplier as well as a meeting with the Department of Veterans' Affairs to review the planning for the 2015 Veterans Day Ceremony.

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS/CONCERNS

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