



## **In This Week's Legislative Watch:**

[AUSN LOOKS BACK ON OUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN 2013](#)  
[AUSN LOOKS AT OMNIBUS FUNDING BILL AND BUDGET ACT COLA FIX DEVELOPMENTS](#)  
[AUSN ON THE HILL](#)  
[PRIORITY BILLS INTRODUCED THIS WEEK](#)  
[NEW LEGISLATIVE ALERTS](#)  
[NEXT WEEK OUTLOOK](#)

*Happy New Year to our AUSN Members! Hope everyone had an enjoyable holidays season with family and friends. AUSN had a productive 2013 year and there is a lot that will be happening in the first few weeks of 2014. Look forward to communicating with all of you in the New Year. Here's the first Legislative Watch for 2014...*

### **AUSN LOOKS BACK ON OUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN 2013**

To say that this year was an exciting year for the AUSN Legislative Department is an understatement. It was an **INCREDIBLE** year for us as an Association. Looking at the Department itself, we grew our Legislative Intern program to having 4 Interns per semester, ranging from Undergraduate, to Graduate to Law School students from everywhere around the country. Our interns included students from George Mason University, NROTC students at George Washington University, James Madison University, Loyola New Orleans, Purdue, American University and the University of Mary Washington. These interns not only learned about advocacy work and our mission to continue to support our Navy, Veterans and their families, but also provided critical support to our staff in order for us to achieve and communicate effectively to Congress and to you, our members. AUSN's Legislative Department also has spearheaded our renovation/re-organization of the *CAPT John Rice Naval Library* with the appointment of an AUSN National Librarian, LCDR Denise Dorn, USN (Ret.) who is in the office regularly to help catalog and get digitally uploaded books in our vast collection. We thank her for her volunteerism and efforts!

In addition, we launched the pilot year of our Legislative Liaison Program, something to our knowledge; this Association had never done before. Utilizing you, our members, as volunteers, our Liaisons met with their Members of the House and their Senators in their State's and effectively communicated our goals and objectives for the year, providing information and support to strengthen our efforts here in D.C. With over 100 AUSN Legislative Liaisons around the country (an average of two per state, some more, some less), over 4 dozen meetings took place in just barely a year since the launch of the program in April 2013! We thank you, our Legislative Liaisons out there, who helped make this a great program as well as the leadership of our former National Vice-President (VP) of Government Relations, RDML Robin Graf (USN), Ret. and our current National VP of Government Relations, CDR Bill Manofsky (USN), Ret. for their work with our Legislative Director on this initiative. We look forward to continuing this program for 2014!

As for our Legislative Accomplishments, despite this being one of the most un-productive Congresses in history, a total of only 72 laws were passed, the military and Veteran community faired okay, but much work needs to be done! To note, the Fiscal Year 2014 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) passed into law on 26 December 2013 (see [AUSN Legislative Analysis on the FY14 NDAA, P.L. 113-66](#)). Within that bill were a few notable provisions including; Section 121, CVN-78 Class Aircraft Carrier Program (authorizes **\$12.9 billion**, requested for CVN-78, caps additional

ships at **\$11.5 billion**); Section 542, Enhancement of Mechanisms to Correlate Military Skills and Training for Civilian Licenses (language from AUSN priority bills S. 700 and H.R. 1796, the Troop Talent Act); Section 701, Continued Availability for Certain Beneficiaries Enrolled in TRICARE PRIME (language from AUSN priority bills S. 1078 and H.R. 1971, the Keep Faith with TRICARE Prime Act); Section 713, Interoperability of Electronic Health Records between Department of Defense and Department of Veterans Affairs; Section 4101 and Section 4102, authorizes **\$400 million** for National Guard and Reserve Equipment Account (NGREA), and; the FY14 NDAA excludes the Department of Defense (DOD) request for TRICARE enrollment fee increase language.

In addition, AUSN also was pleased to help with the passage of H.R. 933 (P.L. 113-6), Title X, Military Tuition Assistance Continuation, stating that the Secretaries of the military departments are to carry out tuition assistance programs for members of the Armed Forces during the remainder of Fiscal Year 2013 (FY13) using funds appropriated for such programs under the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act. This year also saw the passage of AUSN priority bill H.R. 258 (P.L. 113-12), the Stolen Valor Act, whereby the law amends the Federal criminal code relating to fraudulent representation about military service an individual who, with intent to obtain money, property, or other tangible benefit, fraudulently holds himself or herself out to be a recipient of a military decoration.

Also, early in 2013, AUSN was involved in an issue of concern regarding the new Distinguished Warfare Medal. Under pressure from numerous organizations, DOD made a spring 2013 ruling regarding aspects of AUSN priority bills H.R. 833 and S. 470, regarding the new Distinguished Warfare Medal, whereby it would replace the Distinguished Warfare Medal with a device affixed to existing awards to recognize service members who directly affect combat operations without being present. Another AUSN priority bill that saw eventual passage was H.R. 1412 (P.L. 113-37), the Department of Veterans Affairs Expiring Authorities Act, whereby the law makes various program extensions such as allowing, through FY2014, a Veteran's liability for copayments of **\$10** for every day the Veteran receives hospital care and of **\$5** for every day they receive nursing home care; extends the authority of the Secretary of Labor for homeless Veterans reintegration programs, and for the Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA) to contract for referral and counseling services for Veterans at risk of homelessness, and; extends the pilot program to assess feasibility and advisability of providing assistance to Veterans receiving regular or intensive mental health services and other health services in order to obtain child care while receiving such services. Finally, AUSN was pleased to see the passage of another priority bill, S. 893 (P.L. 113-52), the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living-Adjustment (COLA) Act, whereby the law increases the rates of Veterans' disability compensation, and dependency and indemnity compensation for surviving spouses and children by 1.5% beginning 1 January 2014.

#### **AUSN LOOKS AT OMNIBUS FUNDING BILL AND BUDGET ACT COLA FIX DEVELOPMENTS**

*AUSN has been following the recent reports regarding developments with an Omnibus Appropriations bill, rolling many of the Fiscal Year 2014 (FY14) appropriation measures into one bill, after the Bipartisan Budget Act (BBA) passed last month. The BBA was the stepping stone for a negotiated Appropriations measure to pass before the current Continuing Resolution (CR) expires on 15 January 2014, where the nation would face another shutdown scenario like this past October. An aspect being negotiated within the Omnibus Appropriations bill, or a second CR if language in the Omnibus can't be agreed upon, is fixing the Cost-of-Living-Adjustment (COLA) reduction provision to retired military and Veterans that alarmed AUSN and other organization's before the holidays. This was something that follows in line with the myth within the Department of Defense (DOD) that military personnel, compensation and benefit costs are "spiraling' out of control.*

#### **FURTHER READING:**

Recent reports have indicated that what was once forward progress on an Omnibus Appropriations Bill, rolling all the pending various spending measures for the Federal government into one bill to extend Fiscal Year 2014 (FY14) funding levels, has come to a screeching halt. The FY14 spending bill's assembly has been slowed by disputes over politically charged policy riders. Few if any are related to defense, most of the objections are about socially conservative charged measures, but the debate is keeping the Pentagon appropriation measure from hitting the House and Senate floors as part of the larger package. Inclusion of such socially conservative language could threaten to at least delay the whole package and may make it more likely that certain non-defense Executive Branch agencies get another Continuing Resolution (CR) rather than fresh appropriation bills, for FY14. For the Department of Defense (DOD), some disputes still matter, though, because they could be what forces Congress to clear yet another short-term CR next week to buy additional time for more negotiations. In negotiations, House and Senate Appropriators have been racing to finalize a

compromise **\$1.012 trillion** Omnibus before the government runs out of money next week while trying to make spending bills match the spending cap set by last month's Budget deal, H.J. Res. 59, the Bipartisan Budget Act (BBA).

However, some of the trade-offs of the draft Omnibus bill will be painful for lawmakers. In total, appropriators need to reduce total defense-related spending by about **\$25.4 billion** from the levels in the House passed bill, and **\$31.7 billion** from the levels in the companion Senate measure. Slightly less than 95 percent of the **\$520.5 billion** in DOD spending for FY14 resides with the Defense subcommittees, or somewhere in the neighborhood of **\$490 billion** according to senior Congressional staff. Another pending business item, which may see some traction in the next week and linked within the Omnibus spending bill or a second CR, is the Cost-of-Living-Adjustment (COLA) cut to Veterans, disabled Veterans and retirees under 62 that was a part of the BBA last month. The BBA, signed into law on 26 December 2013, requires a 1 percentage point decrease to COLA calculations in the pensions of military retirees who are younger than 62. The provision, which takes effect in December 2015, would yield about **\$6 billion** in savings over 10 years. After the budget deal was unveiled last month, it was also discovered that the COLA reductions would be applied to disabled Veterans and survivors.

Many in Congress, with pressure from Military and Veteran Service Organizations like AUSN, have committed to wanting to kill that whole provision on the grounds that it breaks faith with those who served our country. On the other hand, some believe asking Veterans of working age to pay a little more is an acceptable way to avert some defense budget cuts to today's force. However, virtually everyone in Congress agrees that disabled Veterans and survivors should not have to foot an estimated **\$600 million** in reduced pensions to help with the country's fiscal problems. Lawmakers wanting to eliminate the COLA provision entirely from the BBA may get their wish, assuming common ground can be found on how to offset the lost **\$6 billion** in revenue generated by the provision in the BBA. This provision, glitch as some lawmakers call it, may be changed as part of the catch-all FY14 Omnibus spending bill being put together. The correction could be put into the Defense section of the omnibus, or it could be a stand-alone item in the legislation. However, some lawmakers want a more targeted provision to be put into the Omnibus Appropriations bill to prevent the COLA reduction from applying to solely disabled Veterans or the survivors of Veterans, according to House and Senate sources, but still apply to all other Veterans and retirees under the age of 62.

Details can be found at [AUSN's Capitol Hill Blog on Omnibus Bill and COLA Fix](#).

### **AUSN ON THE HILL**

This week AUSN returned to legislative work by organizing its Fiscal Year 2015 (FY15) priorities and taking a review of its legislative accomplishments for calendar year 2013, Fiscal Year 2014 (FY14). In addition, AUSN participated in a brief by Sikorsky with other Congressional staff on the 'Helo-Gap' debate and the stretching thin of our H-60 fleet within the Navy. This is shaping up to be an issue of concern that AUSN will be keeping an eye on in the next few months in anticipation for the President's Budget (PB) to drop for FY15 (estimated to be mid to late February according to sources within the Administration). AUSN also met with a few Congressional offices this week including staff from Representative Marsha Blackburn (R-TN-07) as well as held a meeting with the Navy in the Pentagon this week on how AUSN can help this upcoming year. Finally, AUSN participated in regular meetings of The Military Coalition (TMC) as well as a TMC conference call with Senator Lindsey Graham (R-SC) to discuss moving forward on fixing the COLA reduction provision from last month's Bipartisan Budget Act (BBA).

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

*No significant legislation introduced.*

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 and Senate are in session and first up is to move on a bill that funds the Federal government for the remainder of Fiscal Year 2014 (FY14) since the Continuing Resolution (CR) expires on 15 January 2014 and lawmakers don't want a repeat shutdown to occur, especially during an election year. At headquarters, AUSN will be welcoming four new interns to the Legislative Department; Lillie Wade of George Mason University, Matthew Short of George Mason University, Bennett Griesmer of American University and Juliana Crum of American University. We look forward to having them in our office and helping our legislative efforts. AUSN will also be participating as an exhibitor at the Surface Navy Association (SNA) Exhibition next week in the Arlington, VA area, discussing our efforts, goals and forthcoming agenda. In addition, AUSN will be meeting with its partners at the U.S. Naval Sea Cadet Corps as well as having a meeting with the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee (SVAC) Chairman, Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT) on upcoming goals and priorities. Finally, next week, AUSN will be monitoring a few Congressional hearings by the House Armed Services Committee (HASC), Subcommittee's on Seapower and of Military Personnel as well as a House Veterans' Affairs Committee (HVAC) hearing on oversight of surgeries at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)

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

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