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**AUSN ANALYZES HOUSE BUDGET PLAN**

*AUSN recently received and analyzed the House Budget Plan, which outlines the blueprint for a 10-year budget plan for the Federal Government. The plan does not include any additional funding for the Department of Defense (DOD) in Fiscal Year 2015 (FY15), keeping spending caps established under the Bipartisan Budget Act (BBA) of 2013 in place. However, over the next nine years, the blueprint calls for close to **\$500 billion** to be shifted from domestic agencies to the Pentagon. Additionally, the plan, called, "The Path to Prosperity" proposal includes a three percent increase in discretionary spending for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), up to **\$131 billion** while FY15 mandatory spending would total **\$175 billion**.*

**FURTHER READING:**

The House Budget Plan, introduced by Representative Paul Ryan (R-WI-01), proposal shifts **\$482 billion** from domestic agencies to the Pentagon from Fiscal Year 2016 (FY16) to Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24). The intention of this shift is to, as House Republicans have said, "Reject the President's additional cuts to national security," and provide adequate funding for the first job of the Federal government, "to protect the country from threats both at home and abroad." The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), General Martin Dempsey, U.S. Army (USA), testified before Congress that America faces current security challenges more formidable and complex than those faced by the nation following any war since World War II. The plan seeks to combat these challenges by providing for a strong and robust military with between **\$6.2 trillion** and **\$6.3 trillion** over the 10-year period in budget authority and outlays, respectively. The plan also includes **\$58.7 billion** appropriated in advance for Veteran's medical care, consistent with the Veterans Health Care Budget and Reform Transparency Act of 2009. The House Budget Committee is "concerned" with the slow progress the VA is having in eliminating the disability-claims backlog and ending Veteran homelessness despite the increase in funding both initiatives have received in recent years and state they will be closely monitoring progress to ensure that fiscal resources provided by Congress are used efficiently. The budget does not assume any savings under the VA and fully funds the nation's commitment to the services and benefits earned by our country's Veterans.

For more details, see [AUSN's Capitol Hill Blog on House Budget Plan](#).

**AUSN LOOKS AT ADDITIONAL 'WISH LIST' FOR NAVY EQUIPMENT SENT TO THE HILL**

*In a 31 March 2014 letter containing the unfunded priorities "Wish List," Admiral (ADM) Jonathan Greenert, the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), explained that the items were important to meeting combatant commander requirements and also included some items that were degraded due to sequestration in Fiscal Year 2013 (FY13) and reduced funding in Fiscal Year 2014 (FY14). ADM Greenert stressed that the items in his wish list, while important, were not to take money away from the programs funded in the Fiscal Year 2015 (FY15) Budget Request. AUSN takes a look and will implement in its advocacy efforts many of the items and equipment request noted in the 'Wish List' including a request for funding for an additional 22 E/A-18G "Growlers."*

**FURTHER READING:**

The President, as a supplement to his Fiscal Year 2015 (FY15) Budget request, already sent his own wish list, the "Opportunity Growth and Security Initiative" (OGSI), which allocates an additional **\$28 billion** worth of defense initiatives and programs, not included in the FY15 President's Budget (PB) request, which he believes should be executed if Congress is able to find funding for them. However, the service chiefs 'Wish List' that they sent earlier this

past week not only include some of the items in the OGS, but also other important priority items that are not included within the FY15 PB that they have identified as important for Congress to consider during (FY15) appropriations and authorization deliberations. Looking first at the OGS request in the FY15 PB, a couple notable Navy procurement items were identified. For example, OGS noted combat aircraft requested funding for the V-22 "Osprey," the P-8A "Poseidon," and the E-2D "Advanced Hawkeye." The appropriations request for the P-8A was the highest at **\$1.1 billion**. The C-40A Clipper, a military cargo and passenger ship which is essentially a Boeing-737, vital for the Navy Reserve in particular, and the KC-130J Super Hercules were also included in the request. The OGS asked for an additional **\$62 million** for AMRAAM missiles as well. There was also a request for a supplementary **\$4.7 million** for spending on AEGIS support equipment, utilized on, for example, Arleigh-Burke Class (DDG-51) destroyers. The OGS request also included appeals for funding for Research and Development. The President asked for **\$24.3 million** for component and prototype testing for the Ohio Class Replacement Submarine Program (SSBN-X), a platform that has frequently been called a top priority for the Navy. The request for research development, and testing funds for the Sikorsky CH-53K came in at **\$5 million**. Finally, the OGS asked for an extra **\$1.4 billion** for Navy construction, and \$61.8 million for Navy Reserve construction.

The unfunded priorities list highlighted a request for funding for an additional 22 E/A-18G "Growlers," a request not reciprocated in the President's OGS. Despite the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) program, which is currently in progress, the Navy has expressed a desire for more E/A-18G's due to their unique and unrivaled enemy jamming capabilities that are unlikely to be attained at the same level with the F-35s. This would reduce the operational risk in future complex electromagnetic anti-access/area-denial environments. Under the maintenance category, the unfunded priorities list asks for \$104 million to fund shipyard recapitalization and \$136 million to fund additional aviation maintenance. The Navy asserts that this will help reduce the maintenance backlog left over from sequestration.

For more details, see [AUSN's Capitol Hill Blog on Navy 'Wish List'](#).

#### **AUSN ANALYZES HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE APPROVED FY15 MILCON/VA Bill**

*The House Appropriations Committee, Subcommittee on Military Construction & Veterans Affairs (HAC-MILCON/VA), on 3 April 2014, unanimously approved its draft version of the MILCON/VA Appropriations bill for Fiscal Year 2015 (FY15). 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 Full HAC markup was on 9 April 2014 where it was also unanimously approved out of Committee.*

#### **FURTHER READING:**

The HAC reported FY15 MILCON/VA bill provides a total of **\$6.6 billion** for military construction (MILCON) projects which is a decrease of **\$3.3 billion** below the enacted FY14 level, and the same as the FY15 PB request. The funding provided will be used for both large and small construction and renovation projects on military bases within the U.S. and around the globe. In regards to Military Family Housing, the bill provides a total of **\$1.2 billion** to fund construction, operation and maintenance of military family housing for FY15. This is **\$325 million** below the FY14 level, due to savings from the privatization of family housing, a reduced need for new facilities, and no construction funding requests by the Air Force. The funding provided will ensure quality housing is continued for all 1,231,044 military families currently served by the program. In regards to Military Medical Facilities, the bill includes **\$485.9 million** for construction and alterations for new or existing military medical facilities. This funding will allow for continued support and care for 9.8 million eligible beneficiaries, including our wounded troops abroad. Finally, the bill includes **\$426.5 million** for construction or alteration of Guard and Reserve facilities in 17 states.

The bill also provides a total of **\$158.2 billion** in both discretionary and mandatory funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), an increase of **\$10.3 billion** above the FY14 enacted level. Discretionary funding alone for Veterans programs in the bill is **\$64.7 billion**. Approximately **\$55.6 billion** of this discretionary total was provided last year via advance funding in the FY14 Appropriations bill. The HAC-MILCON/VA Subcommittee continues the tradition of Advanced Appropriations by including **\$58.7 billion** in advance for Fiscal Year 2016 (FY16). The legislation also includes provisions to increase oversight of taxpayer dollars at the VA, including requiring the agency to report on construction expenditures and savings, forbidding new changes in the scope of construction projects, and restricting the agency from taking certain spending actions without notifying Congress. Overall, the bill is **\$10.3 billion** above the FY14 enacted level, but **\$5.7 million** below the FY15 PB request (a 3.5% decrease).

For more details, see AUSN's [Legislative Analysis on the House Appropriations FY15 MILCON/VA Bill](#).

### **SENATE ARMED SERVICES, TACAIR SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING ON FY15 AVIATION PROGRAMS**

*On 8 April 2014, the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC), Subcommittee on Airland held its hearing on Tactical Aircraft (TACAIR) Programs in review of the Defense Authorization Request for Fiscal Year 2015 (FY15) and the Future Years Defense Program. Notable witnesses at the hearing were; Lieutenant General (Lt Gen) Christopher C. Bogdan, USAF, Program Executive Officer (PEO) for the F-35 Lightning II Joint Program Office; Lieutenant General (Lt Gen) Charles R. Davis, USAF, Military Deputy To the Assistant Secretary of the Air Force For Acquisition; Vice Admiral (VADM) Paul A. Grosklags, USN Principal Military Deputy to the Assistant Secretary of the Navy For Research, Development, and Acquisition; and, Lieutenant General (LtGen) Robert E. Schmidle, Jr., USMC, Deputy Commandant of the Marine Corps for Aviation. The hearing was held by SASC- Airland Chairman, Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), and SASC- Airland Ranking Member, Senator Roger Wicker (R-MS). Chairman Blumenthal expressed concern over the Navy's estimated shortfall in aircraft to fully outfit our nation's aircraft carriers, due in large part to the Navy's delayed F-35C purchases from last year. Ranking Member Wicker stated that the Department of Defense (DOD) needs to modernize our tactical aircraft programs while staying on time and on budget, and to do so they must get their acquisition programs in order.*

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

The hearing then began to hear opening statements by the witnesses. Lt Gen Bogdan stated that the F-35 programs are on time and prepared to meet all requirements over the next two years and that besides a quantity reduction in FY15, the F-35 programs have weathered budget constraints intact. Next, VADM Grosklags gave a joint statement for both himself and LtGen Schmidle from the Department of the Navy in which he stated the Navy is continuing acquisition of 5<sup>th</sup> generation tactical aircraft such as the F-35B and F-35C into the carrier air wing and expeditionary forces while maintaining and modernizing the capability of the current TACAIR fleet. The F-35B will replace Marine Corps F/A-18 and AV-8B aircraft. The F-35C, F/A-18E/F, and EA-18G provide complementary capabilities that enhance the versatility, lethality, and survivability of our air wings. He stated that the Navy has maintained F-35B procurement profile achieving program procurement stability in line with the improvements in program accountability, discipline and transparency. However, due to fiscal constraints and Navy priorities, he went on to say that the Navy was compelled to reduce F-35C procurement by 33 airframes across the Future Years Defense Program (FYDP), 4 in particular for FY15. Despite this reduction, he stressed that the Navy and Marine Corps are fully committed to the F-35B and F-35C variants as the Navy believes these aircrafts are on a solid path to delivering required capabilities. He went on to state that the F/A-18A-F will continue to receive capability enhancements to sustain its lethality well into the next decade including future avionics upgrades which will enable network-centric operations for situational awareness and transfer of data to command-and-control nodes.

Chairman Blumenthal then began questioning by asking Lt Gen Bogdan how long the software delay for F-35's is. Lt Gen Bogdan responded that the F-35 has three different blocks of software, two of which are on time, and the third of which (the 3F block) is delayed 4-6 months. He continued to say that the 3F block of software is what the Navy will use to declare initial operating capability with its F-35's but that it is not due online until 2018 so he and the program have time to catch up. Chairman Blumenthal then asked how he planned to catch up to which Lt Gen Bogdan responded that DOD is no longer watching as contractors fulfill program requirements but rather taking an active role and directing the process. Next, Senator John McCain (R-AZ) asked if there was an increase in cost with the delay in software to which Lt Gen Bogdan assured that there was no cost increase. Senator Jeff Sessions (R-AL) asked for the most recent costs of the F-35 program and what the overall cost trends were within the program. Lt Gen Bogdan responded that an F-35A (Air Force variant) will currently cost approximately **\$112 million** and that the price has come down with each purchase order or lot, with a target of **\$80-\$85 million** per aircraft including industry profit by Fiscal Year 2019 (FY19).

### **HOUSE VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE HEARING ON VA MEDICAL CARE**

*On 9 April 2014, the House Veterans Affairs Committee (HVAC) held a hearing on the continued assessment of delays in Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical care. The first panel consisted of a Veteran, Mr. Barry Coates, and Mr. Daniel M. Dellinger, National Commander of the American Legion. The second panel consisted of Debra A. Draper, Director of Health Care at the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and Dr. John D. Daigh, Assistant Inspector General for Healthcare Inspections at the Office of the Inspector General for the VA. The third panel consisted of Dr. Thomas Lynch, Assistant Deputy Undersecretary for Health for Clinical Operations at the Veterans Health*

*Administration (VHA) and he was accompanied by Dr. Carolyn M. Clancy, Assistant Deputy Undersecretary for Quality, Safety, and Value at the VHA. The hearing was held by HVAC Chairman, Representative Jeff Miller (R-FL-01), and Acting Ranking Member, Representative Corrine Brown (D-FL-05), who was filling in for Ranking Member, Representative Michael Michaud (D-ME-02). During the hearing, concerns were voiced about how the delays in medical care have been increasing and some have even resulted in Veteran deaths.*

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

The hearing began with opening statements from both Chairman Miller and Acting Ranking Member Brown. Chairman Miller testified that one adverse death is too many at the VA but also acknowledged no medical system is infallible. He also stated that the VA healthcare system needs to become more proactive in preventing issues from occurring rather than reacting to issues that do occur. Acting Ranking Member Brown referred to a 2009 case where VA employees noticed that staff members were improperly handling both equipment and patient cases and stated that there needed to be procedures in place so that staff members can freely report impropriety to ensure that our Veterans get the care they deserve. Mr. Coates, a terminally ill Veteran, testified to his personal experience where he needed a colonoscopy and was forced to wait over a year, where it was then discovered he had stage four colon cancer that had advanced to his lungs as well. Dr. Lynch testified that the VA is leading a shift in looking at how to prevent illnesses, how to treat illnesses, as well as a shift in becoming more transparent when problems do occur and addressing such issues.

In questioning, Chairman Miller asked Mr. Coates if at any point he had been advised that he could use a private provider with reimbursement from the VA in order to get timely care to which Mr. Coates responded that he was never advised of such an option but that he would have taken private care had he been advised. Representative Gus Bilirakis (R-FL-12) asked Mr. Dellinger about the lengthy delay both in responding to crises and answering of questions by the VA and if that was standard. Mr. Dellinger responded that lengthy delays are very standard from the VA because everything is centralized and local centers have limited power. Chairman Miller asked Dr. Lynch about the unofficial electronic waitlist at the Phoenix, Arizona VA Clinic that, when cross-referenced with the actual wait-list, could have led to up to 40 deaths at the local center due to delays in treatment and care. Dr. Lynch responded that he was not aware of this particular report or situation but that he would absolutely look into it and report back to the committee. Representative Julia Brownley (D-CA-26) asked Dr. Lynch to explain why fee based care was reduced at the Columbia, South Carolina clinic. The doctor explained that the facility felt that they had the resources to solve the issues they faced when they did not in reality have such resources. He went on to state that the VA is working to develop a system focused on delays in care at local centers and looking at trends in those delays to figure out the necessary amount of fee based care, working with local facilities to solve problems.

## **SENATE ARMED SERVICES, PERSONNEL SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING ON FY15 PERSONNEL PROGRAMS**

*On 9 April 2014, the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC), Subcommittee on Personnel held a hearing to follow up on a previous hearing discussing Active, Guard, Reserve, and Civilian personnel programs in review of the Defense Authorization Request for Fiscal Year 2015 and the Future Years Defense Program. The hearing was presided over by SASC- Personnel Chairwoman, Senator Gillibrand (D-NY), and SASC- Personnel Ranking Member, Senator Lindsey Graham (R-SC). Notable witnesses included Vice Admiral (VADM) William F. Moran, Chief of Naval Personnel/Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for Manpower, Personnel, Training and Education, Lieutenant General (LtGen) Robert Milstead, the Deputy Commandant of the Marine Corps for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy (MCPON) Michael Stevens, and Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps (SgtMajMC) Michael Barrett. Chairwoman Gillibrand opened the hearing with her own statement where she encouraged the implementation of gender neutral occupational requirements across the services and also expressed some disappointment that her bill failed, which would transfer the authority to decide whether a sexual assault case will be heard to a JAG rather than a commanding officer. Ranking Member Graham then expressed a desire to discuss the sustainability of TRICARE as it exists today.*

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

In his opening statement, VADM Moran stressed that sequestration conditions in the future would irreversibly affect the long-term combat readiness of the Naval force. MCPON Stevens, in his opening statement, also stressed that the best weapons system investment the Navy could make would be in morale of its Sailors. He also expressed concern that the new budget with its constraints upon our Navy would become the new norm. Ranking Member Graham began the questioning by asking about several possibilities for reducing spending in the personnel category. The entire panel

agreed that current servicemembers should be grandfathered to protect them from new reforms and none of the panel members thought that pay reductions were an appealing or plausible means for spending reform. The panel seemed to agree that a phased approach was necessary to introduce changes to TRICARE premiums and a slight decrease in housing benefits. Ranking Member Graham stated that the last time TRICARE premiums had been changed was in 1995.

Next, Senator Tim Kaine (D-VA) asked about increasing opportunities for women to participate in different arenas in the services that were previously unavailable to them. VADM Moran responded that the Navy had been working for a couple of years on an initiative to place women on submarines, adding that the officers currently stationed on the *Ohio* Class submarines (SSGN) were doing well and next year women were going to be phased onto the smaller, *Virginia* Class submarines (SSN). Senator Angus King (D-ME) asked about the possible effects of a 2016 sequester. VADM Moran replied that, just like the last period of sequestration, morale would be affected by the unpredictability of deployments and the tolls they put on Sailors' family lives. Additionally, the effects could be worse this time around since the Navy has already used the supplemental funds it was able to come up with last time to counter the impact of budget constraints. Senator King asked about how the cuts to benefits such as the commissary would affect enlistment and retention rates. MCPON Stevens and other panel members agreed that they were unsure how recruitment would be affected since many of the servicemembers are motivated by a call to service and not compensation. However, he conceded that it does affect retention rates and certainly would not have a positive impact if any on recruitment. Finally, Senator Mazie Hirono (D-HI) asked the panel members whether their service branches had a performance assessment of the Post-9/11 GI Bill or any sense of how it was being used. MCPON Stevens replied that he knew first hand that the GI Bill was a great benefit for servicemembers, especially when it came to being able to find careers after leaving the military.

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

*On 10 April 2014, the House Armed Services Committee (HASC), Subcommittee on Readiness, held its hearing on the Department of Defense's (DOD's) Readiness Posture. The witnesses present at the hearing were Admiral (ADM) Mark Ferguson, Vice Chief of Naval Operations (VCNO), and General (Gen) John M. Paxton Jr., Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps, United States Marine Corps (USMC). The hearing was held by HASC- Readiness Chairman, Representative Rob Wittman (R-VA-01), and HASC- Readiness Ranking Member, Delegate Madeleine Bordallo (D-Guam). Chairman Wittman outlined the purpose of the hearing was to focus on the DOD's readiness posture, stating that that the Bipartisan Budget Act (BBA) of 2013 gave temporary alleviation to the Armed Services, however sequestration is still the law and will come back unless something is done to repeal it. Such impacts he mentioned sequestration having included the Navy having to reduce its overall force structure that include phased modernization of 11 Aegis Cruisers (CGs) and amphibious warships over the next few years in addition to an out years request to early retire an aircraft carrier, the USS George Washington (CVN-73). Finally, he stressed that his top priority was to ensure that our risk is low and our readiness is high. Ranking Member Bordallo remarked that Congress, through the establishment of sequestration, had created the greatest threat to our military's readiness.*

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

ADM Ferguson began, in his opening statement, that the Navy's mandate was forward presence, and that it has, and would continue to, shape events and provide immediate response to crises all over the world. Noting that the BBA has helped to maintain the current state of readiness that the Navy possesses, the President's Budget (PB) for Fiscal Year 2015 (FY15) would ensure that the Navy continues to have high level of readiness, and that the Navy receives the training and resources required to sustain the level of readiness that is expected of it. At the same time, ADM Ferguson admitted that in order to maintain such a level under the current fiscal environment does mean that reductions in aircraft and weapons are higher than last year's request. Additionally, the PB request does provide lower funding for the shore facilities, which will affect the Navy's long term readiness, but must be done to ensure its short term readiness is not harmed. Finally, ADM Ferguson ended by noting that if the sequester returns in Fiscal Year 2016 (FY16), it would cause a massive reduction in readiness and would cause massive damage to the size and abilities of the Navy. Gen Paxton stated that the Marine's readiness today is directly related to the current fiscal environment, and that training proficiency and readiness remain at the top of Marine Corps' priority list. In his closing remarks he emphasized the necessity and need for more amphibious ships in the Navy and Marine Corps.

Following these opening remarks Chairman Wittman allowed the Subcommittee members to ask questions, starting with Ranking Member Bordallo. Delegate Bordallo asked both witness to explain the impact that sequestration would have

on the readiness of their forces if it came back into full effect next year. ADM Ferguson responded that the overall size of the Navy would be reduced. This could include one less submarine (SSN), three less destroyers (DDGs), less active/deployed cruisers (CGs), and one less battle platform. In addition, he noted that the capability of the Navy to perform a surge would go undone, as well as the investments in its long term infrastructure. In conclusion he stated that it would be a smaller and less capable Navy. Gen Paxton stated that sequestration would force the Marine Corps to drop down to an active size of 175,000. In addition, the current and future overall readiness of the entire Marine Corps would be severely hurt; with massive cuts in future investments and a huge rise in the number of rotations each unit would need to have. Through further questioning by the Subcommittee members the witnesses testified on a variety of issues ranging from the number of amphibious ships needed to the readiness and status of the civilian employees of the branches.

Finally, Chairman Wittman asked a question regarding what the current level of readiness currently is for each of the services, what it would be if the Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) funds were removed, and what the consequences would be if the sequester took effect again. ADM Ferguson responded that under the current state of readiness 44% of the current combatant command requirements are being met. Furthermore, if OCO were gone, the Navy would lose **\$7 billion to \$8 billion** dollars a year that they heavily rely on. The loss of such funds would force the Navy to go into other DOD accounts to meet the demands of the present. Thus, the Navy would be hurting its long term readiness for the short term. Finally, ADM Ferguson stated that sequestration would cause a smaller and less capable navy that would not be able to carry out the current mission it has been given. Gen Paxton responded that 63% of every dollar currently spent in the Marines is spent on readiness. The next 27% is spent on support, and that the last 10% is spent on building the future. This current breakdown is not putting very little investment into our future readiness, which will come back to hurt us in time. Noting that the Marine Corps relies on the OCO just like the Navy, any loss of funds there would also hurt the Marine Corps. In closing, Gen Paxton stated that the risk in the future is only going to grow if the USMC does not invest more in our future readiness, as we are getting trapped in a death spiral of not being able to train our troops properly due to constant cuts in our future readiness to pay for our current level of readiness.

#### **AUSN ON THE HILL**

This week, besides monitoring Congressional hearings, AUSN held many meetings on Capitol Hill. Early this week, AUSN met with staff of Representative John Fleming (R-LA-04), a Member of the House Armed Services Committee (HASC), to discuss military compensation and benefits as well as Navy equipment and mefloquine exposure of Veterans due to his Navy physician background. Additionally, AUSN met w/ staff of Senator Thad Cochran (R-MS), the Ranking Member of the Senate Appropriations Committee (SAC), to discuss Navy equipment funding as well as military compensation concerns within the President's Budget (PB) for Fiscal Year 2015 (FY15). AUSN also attended the Sea-Air-Space Expo, participated in a roundtable discussion regarding the Littoral Combat Ship (LCS) on Capitol Hill this week and attended the presentation of the Navy Reserve Officer of the Year award at Fort Meyer. Finally, AUSN attended the Veteran Service Organization (VSO) quarterly roundtable with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Undersecretary for Benefits, General Allison Hickey, and spoke with members of The Military Coalition (TMC) regarding retirement proposals and concerns with the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission (MCRMC).

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

**S. 2243, Military and Veteran Caregiver Services Improvement Act.** Introduced by Senator Patty Murray (D-WA), the bill would expand eligibility for the program of comprehensive assistance for family caregivers of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), to expand benefits available to participants under such program, to enhance special compensation for members of the uniformed services who require assistance in everyday life.

**S. 2231, Medical Evaluation Parity for Servicemembers (MEPS) Act.** Introduced by Senator Rob Portman (R-OH), the bill would amend Title 10, United States Code, to provide an individual with a mental health assessment before the individual enlists in the Armed Forces or is commissioned as an officer in the Armed Forces.

**S. 2217, Military Mental Health Review Board Improvement Act.** Introduced by Senator Jon Tester (D-MT), the bill would amend Title 10, United States Code, to enhance the participation of mental health professionals in boards for the correction of military records and boards for the review of the discharge or dismissal of members of the Armed Forces.

**H.R. 4446, (Official title yet to be released).** Introduced by Representative Bill Shuster (R-PA-09), the bill would require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to conduct a study on matters relating to the claiming and interring of unclaimed remains of Veterans.

**H.R. 4408, Lawrence J. Hackett Jr. Vietnam Veterans Agent Orange Fairness Act.** Introduced by Representative

Daniel Maffei (D-NY-24), the bill would direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a task force on Agent Orange exposure.

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 two 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 #113-40: SUPPORT H.R. 3576 & S. 1728, Safeguarding Elections for Nation’s Troops (SENTRI) Act**

**Legislative Alert #113-41: URGE Congress to Hold DOD Accountable for Revised Space-A Travel Regulations**

#### **NEXT WEEK OUTLOOK**

Next week both the House and Senate will be out of session for two weeks. They will return the week of 28 April 2014, where the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) will be expected to markup its Fiscal Year 2015 (FY15) National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) bill, which has been introduced in the form of H.R. 4435, and the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) will be hosting its last rounds of hearings before it begins its markup process of the FY15 NDAA. In the meantime, AUSN will be meeting with Congressional staff in anticipation for the upcoming Committee markups as well as meeting with Navy and Department of Defense (DOD) staff on improving ways AUSN can work with Navy and DOD. In addition, AUSN will be participating in an Association of the United States Army (AUSA) roundtable as part of a family advocacy panel on 25 April 2014 at the Marriott at City Center in Newport News, VA. Finally, AUSN will be hosting its first Career Development Symposium in Norfolk, VA from 23-34 April 2014 in Norfolk, VA. For more information, please visit the [AUSN Career Development Symposium website here](#).

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

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