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### **AUSN ANALYZES CBO REPORT ON SEQUESTRATION IMPLEMENTATION ON EVE OF BUDGET RELEASE**

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) released their final report last month on sequestration possibilities for Fiscal Year 2013 (FY13). In the context of the CBO's report, this sequestration is different than the mandatory across the board cuts imposed due to failed deficit reduction agreements. This look at sequestration is based on CBO estimates of current spending levels and if they exceed designated spending cap levels, resulting in budget cancellations. Based on legislation enacted up to the date of the CBO's report, adjustments to the original \$1.043 trillion dollar cap will total \$152.6 billion. These adjustments include a \$117.5 billion dollar increase to security programs with \$98.7 billion allocated for overseas operations, \$11.7 billion for disaster relief, and \$7 billion for emergency requirements. There is an additional \$35.1 billion dollar increase for non-security programs. The CBO reports that the final breakdown of the budget will be \$801.5 billion for security programs and \$394.1 billion for non-security programs, for a total budget of \$1.2 trillion. According to CBO estimates, the appropriations for non-security categories were \$1 million below cap levels, and security programs were equal to their maximum cap levels. As such, the CBO estimates that no sequestration is required.

Details can be found on [AUSN's Capitol Hill Blog on the CBO's Sequestration Report.](#)

### **HOUSE VETERANS' AFFAIRS, ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING ON PENDING BILLS**

On 10 April 2013, the House Veterans' Affairs Committee (HVAC), Economic Opportunity Subcommittee held a hearing regarding a few pending bills including the [GI Bill Tuition Fairness Act of 2013 \(H.R. 357\)](#) and the [Veterans Retraining Assistance Program \(VRAP\) Extension Act of 2013 \(H.R. 562\)](#). [AUSN sent a letter of support for H.R. 357](#), which would amend title 38, United States Code (USC), to require courses of education provided by public institutions of higher education that are approved for purposes of the educational assistance programs administered by the Secretary of Veterans' Affairs, to charge veterans tuition and fees at the in-State rate. [AUSN also sent a letter of support for H.R. 562](#), would extend VRAP through June 2014 and would make it easier for program participants to finish job-training programs that they've already started. Notable witnesses included; Curtis L. Coy, Deputy Under Secretary for Economic

Opportunity, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Keith Kelly, Assistant Secretary of the Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS), Department of Labor, Dr. Susan Aldridge, Senior Fellow, American Association of State Colleges and Universities, Col. Michael Denning, Director, Office of Graduate Military Programs, University of Kansas, and Lt. Gen. Joseph Weber, Vice President of Student Affairs, Texas A&M University.

In his opening statement, HVAC Chairman, Representative Jeff Miller (R-FL-01), asserted that bodies that establish residency requirements should be required to make allowances to veterans and servicemembers, especially since some states have passed legislation that grants in-state tuition rates undocumented persons and their children. Mr. Coy, in his opening statement, stressed that the VA supports extension of VRAP and that a longer timeframe would allow for the collection of sufficient amount of data on the benefits of the program. Mr. Kelly noted in his opening statement that the Department of Labor also supports H.R. 562. However, in her opening statement, Dr. Aldridge contended that implementation of H.R. 357 could have several underlying consequences; including limiting educational options and possible denial of GI Bill benefits in states that choose to opt out of the GI Bill program in order to avoid waiving residency requirements for Veterans. Lt. Gen. Weber opened by noting the various programs that Texas A&M has implemented in order to grant access to higher education to Veterans and their families. One program that he highlighted was the Military Waiver Program that grants in-state tuition rates to veterans that intend on staying in the state following graduation. The aim of the program, he stated, was to recruit Veterans to become successful state residents.

Representative Julia Brownley (D-CA-26) questioned Lt. Gen. Weber about the cost to Texas A&M University associated with their programs for Veterans. Lt. Gen. Weber noted that Texas A&M currently has a \$1.3 billion budget and with that they could afford to allot \$10 million to finance programs geared toward helping Veterans.

### **PRESIDENT'S BUDGET REQUEST HITS CONGRESS**

On 10 April 2013, in the early afternoon, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) released the President's Budget (PB) request for Fiscal Year 2014 (FY14). The PB request is \$900 million below enacted levels for FY13, not including the across-the-board sequester cuts that brought the Pentagon's base budget down to \$492.9 billion. But the proposal, which was briefed to leaders of the Congressional defense committees Wednesday morning, is strangely about \$52 billion above the budget cap for next year. Puzzled Congressional leaders believe this number will be negotiated through Congressional deliberations on Capitol Hill and expect changes to be forthcoming. The Department of Defense (DOD) request, including Military Construction (MILCON), would total \$526.6 billion for the so-called base budget, plus an \$88 billion "placeholder" for war costs that will be altered once a decision is made on how troop numbers in Afghanistan will decline into 2014 and beyond. Since force levels for Afghanistan have not yet been finalized, the DOD Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) request assumes, for pricing purposes only, that 34,000 U.S. troops will remain in Afghanistan through September 2014. The White House expects to send an amended Overseas Contingency Operations account request to Capitol Hill in late April or early May, according to Defense Department budget materials.

The total FY14 Defense Budget total for the Navy stands at \$155.8 billion. In addition, the Administration is looking to cutting \$562 million in the Navy's cruiser (CG) modernization program and proposes another round of Base Re-Alignment and Closure (BRAC) stating savings of \$12 billion a year from previous rounds that DOD insists is essential and defends with previous year's savings. Furthermore, the PB proposes increases TRICARE fees again affecting retirees and Veterans while also increasing co-pays for pharmaceuticals (except for active-duty members of the military). The Pentagon says the changes, which would be phased in over the next several years, are aimed at bringing beneficiaries' cost share closer to the levels originally envisioned when TRICARE was created in 1996. Total savings in FY14 are estimated at \$297 million; however lawmakers and Veteran Service Organizations (VSO's), including AUSN, have strongly pushed back typically against such proposals and are expected to again.

However, the FY14 Budget leaves most major programs, including the multi-service F-35 Joint Strike Fighter (JSF), virtually untouched. The FY14 request for the F-35 comes to \$8.4 billion. In addition, the budget would continue to fund the procurement of two Virginia Class attack submarines (SSN's), Littoral Combat Ship's (LCS) and P-8 Poseidon aircraft. A brief summary of DOD's FY14 Budget can be found at [DOD's news website here](#).

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is one of the few agencies where the PB is proposing significantly higher

funding levels over FY12. Under the FY14 Budget, the VA would receive \$63.5 billion in discretionary funds, an 8.5 percent increase over the FY12 enacted level. In addition, the budget includes \$3.1 billion in estimated collections from health insurers, bringing the total discretionary budget authority to approximately \$66.5 billion. This is the fifth consecutive year the President has called for more money for the VA. In explaining yet another increase, the PB cites a “solemn obligation” to meet the needs of today’s 21st century Veteran population. To that end, the PB is asking for \$2.5 billion for the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), a 13.6 percent increase from the fiscal 2013 enacted level. The Veterans Benefits Administration has been widely criticized for a sharp increase in the backlog of Veterans’ claims under the current Administration’s watch.

AUSN is continuing to monitor and establish a thorough analysis report of the FY14 PB which will be posted on our website sometime early next week.

### **HOUSE VETERANS’ AFFAIRS COMMITTEE HEARING ON FY14 VA BUDGET REQUEST**

On Thursday, 11 April 2013, the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee (HVAC) held a hearing titled, “U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Budget Request for Fiscal Year 2014 (FY14).” The witnesses included Secretary of the Department of Veterans’ Affairs (VA), General Eric Shinseki, Under Secretary of Veterans Health Administration (VHA), Dr. Robert Petzel and Under Secretary of Veterans’ Benefits Administration (VBM), General Allison Hickey.

HVAC Chairman, Representative Jeff Miller (R-FL-01), began the hearing voicing his frustration over the timeliness of the President’s Fiscal Year 2014 (FY14) Budget Request and pointed out the fact that there had been only 24 hours from the time President Obama dropped the FY14 Budget Request to the time this hearing was set to begin, emphasizing that he and the other Committee Members were given little to no time to assess the FY14 Budget Request. The Chairman then continued by saying that President Obama’s FY14 Budget Request gave the Chairman mixed emotions. He was delighted to see the Nation’s priorities are in the right order, pointing out the fact that VA is set to experience a 4.3% increase in its discretionary funding and that the VBA would experience an even bigger hike of 13.4% in increased funding. He also voiced his appreciation for the 7.2% increase in funding for mental health services.

Secretary Shinseki then thanked the Committee for holding the hearing and doing so much for the American Veteran. He then stated the President Obama’s FY14 Budget Request signifies the Administration’s dedication to the Veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), highlighting the fact that in a time of harsh budget cuts the President is increasing what America will spend on care for ill and wounded Veterans. He then told the Committee that 62% of VA benefits users are OIF or OEF Veterans. He closed by stating that 30 of the 56 VA health centers are on the new Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS), and that all 56 will be on the VBMS by the close of 2013. Of all the things discussed, by Secretary Shinseki and his Under Secretary’s and the Committee members, MODERNIZATION of records, disability claims procedures and the way VA health centers do business is going to continue to be the chief priority of the VA. In all, the FY14 Budget Request allocates \$66.5 billion in discretionary spending and \$86 billion in mandatory spending, for a total of \$152.7 billion in funding for FY14.

### **AUSN ON THE HILL**

Congress returned this week from a two week recess, preparing for what is looking like another tough budget year. In addition to monitoring hearings on Capitol Hill as well as the release of the President’s Budget, AUSN began to prepare for its advocacy efforts, looking at key offices to meet with in the next few weeks and start coordinating its Legislative Liaison program, which was launched officially on 1 April 2013. We are still looking for volunteers from a few states, see announcement below, however we have over 100 volunteers from over 40 states! In addition, AUSN met with a few offices, including staff of Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) who recently signed onto many AUSN priority bills including S. 629, the Veteran Status for Reservist Component bill, as well as staff of Representative Jeff Miller (R-FL-01), Chairman of the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee (HVAC), staff of Representative Raul Ruiz (D-CA-36), staff of Representative Jim Bridenstine (R-OK-01), and staff of Senator Patty Murray (D-WA). Finally, AUSN provided an insider’s tour of the U.S. House of Representatives to a select group of Sailors from the Washington Navy Yard (WNY) as well as the Office of the Chief of Navy Reserve (OCNR). Along with the normal tour route, the Sailors got to see things normally not on the tour, including a House floor tour where they got to sit in the Member’s chairs and walk down the aisle that the President does during the State of the Union. This tour, with the help of the Office of Speaker of the House John Boehner (R-OH-08), also allowed a stop in the Speaker’s personal Capitol office as well as the Speaker’s Balcony which provides one of the best views of Washington, D.C.

## **PRIORITY BILLS INTRODUCED THIS WEEK**

**S. 700, Troop Talent Act of 2013.** Introduced by Senator Tim Kaine (D-VA), the bill would ensure that the education and training provided members of the Armed Forces and veterans better assists members and veterans in obtaining civilian certifications and licenses.

**S. 674, Accountability for Veterans Act of 2013.** Introduced by Senator Dean Heller (R-NV), the bill would require prompt responses from the heads of covered Federal agencies when the Secretary of Veterans Affairs requests information necessary to adjudicate claims for benefits under laws administered by the Secretary.

**H.R. 1494, Blue Water Navy Ship Accountability Act.** Introduced by Representative Chris Gibson (R-NY-19), the bill would direct the Secretary of Defense to review the operation of certain ships during the Vietnam Era.

**H.R. 1464, Military Mental Health Empowerment Act.** Introduced by Representative Andre Carson (D-IN-07), the bill would amend title 10, United States Code, to provide notice to members of the Armed Forces, beginning with recruit basic training and the initial training of officer candidates, regarding the availability of mental health services, to help eliminate perceived stigma associated with seeking and receiving mental health services, and to clarify the extent to which information regarding a member seeking and receiving mental health services may be disclosed.

**H.R. 1463, Military Suicide Reduction Act.** Introduced by Representative Andre Carson (D-IN-07), the bill would amend title 10, United States Code, to improve the mental health assessments provided to members of the Armed Forces deployed in support of a contingency operation.

**H.R. 1453, (Official title yet to be released).** Introduced by Representative Mark Takano (D-CA-41), the bill would amend title 38, United States Code, to extend the authority to provide work-study allowance for certain activities by individuals receiving educational assistance by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

**H.R. 1412, Improving Job Opportunities for Veterans Act of 2013.** Introduced by Representative Mike Coffman (R-CO-06), the bill would improve and increase the availability of on-job training and apprenticeship programs carried out by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

**H.R. 1405, (Official title yet to be released).** Introduced by Representative Dina Titus (D-NV-01), the bill would amend title 38, United States Code, to require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to include an appeals form in any notice of decision issued for the denial of a benefit sought.

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. Again, 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 Congress will continue to debate the release of the President’s Budget (PB) request for Fiscal Year 2014 (FY14) through a series of Committee hearings by Armed Services, Appropriations and Veterans’ Affairs Committees. In addition, AUSN will be meeting with Representative J. Randy Forbes (R-VA-04), House Armed Services Committee (HASC) Seapower Subcommittee Chairman, about working together through this budget process as well as a few other Congressional offices. Finally, AUSN will be attending a few Hill events, including a House Veterans’ Affairs Committee (HVAC) roundtable discussion by HVAC Chairman, Representative Jeff Miller (R-FL-01) to discuss concerns with other VSO’s.

## **AUSN LEGISLATIVE DEPARTMENT STILL SEEKING LEGISLATIVE LIAISON VOLUNTEERS FOR 2013**

AUSN has received numerous volunteers for the Legislative Liaison program and is grateful for everyone who has

thrown their hands up to help in our grassroots efforts in the states. AUSN's Legislative Director and National Vice President of Government Relations have spoken recently on our current volunteers and are finalizing details which will be released before the end of the month. The program officially launched on 1 April 2013 and we have already had our volunteers out in the field engaging their Members of Congress in their state and district offices.

However, AUSN is still seeking TWO VOLUNTEER AUSN MEMBERS per state, (PARTICULARLY to fill a few remaining gaps from Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, Delaware, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine, Michigan, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah, Vermont, Washington, West Virginia and Wyoming) 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](mailto:anthony.wallis@ausn.org) and copy RDML Graf, at [grafrl@cox.net](mailto:grafrl@cox.net).

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

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