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**CLAY HUNT SUICIDE PREVENTION ACT SIGNED INTO LAW BY THE PRESIDENT  
By Edgar Rodriguez, Director of Legislation and Government Relations**

On February 12, 2015, the Clay Hunt Veteran Suicide Prevention Act was signed into law the President. The Clay Hunt Veteran Suicide Prevention Act is named after Clay Hunt, a Marine Corps veteran who served in Iraq and Afghanistan, and who took his own life in 2011 after losing his struggle with post-traumatic stress. The new law will work to reduce veteran suicides by increasing access to mental healthcare, establishing a student loan repayment pilot program to recruit and retain VA psychiatrists, and will require an annual evaluation of DOD and VA suicide-prevention programs.

We at AUSN are proud of the work that we have done in pushing for this bill to become law. As Congress considers additional legislation that addresses military and veteran suicide in the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress we at AUSN will continue to work towards policies that ensure the health and well being of our service members and veterans.

**ASHTON CARTER CONFIRMED TO BE THE NEXT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
By Jessica Taylor, Legislative Intern**

On February 12, 2015, the Senate confirmed the nomination of Ashton Carter to officially replace Chuck Hagel as Secretary of Defense. Carter received bipartisan support in a 93 to 5 vote. Carter, a Pentagon insider, previously served as Deputy Secretary of Defense under both Leon Panetta and Chuck Hagel.

President Obama praised Carter in a statement released after the confirmation vote. "With his decades of experience, Ash will help keep our military strong as we continue the fight against terrorist networks, modernize our alliances, and invest in new capabilities to keep our armed forces prepared for long-term threats."

Despite Secretary Carter's experience he enters his position at the Pentagon at time when defense

issues are of critical nature, such as the budget under sequestration and the United States' action against ISIS. While Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, John McCain, supports Carter's confirmation, he expresses his doubts on his capabilities in the position due to limited resources and not being able to stand up to the White House. "When it comes to much of our national security policy, I must candidly express concern about the task that awaits Dr. Carter and the limited influence he may have."

### **HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE HEARING ON THE DOD BUDGET REQUEST: ALTERNATIVE CHOICE**

**By Jessica Taylor, Legislative Intern**

On February 11, 2015, four experts from leading think tanks testified before the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) to analyze strategies and to address the future defense budget. There was a consensus amongst the witnesses: Dr. Nora Bensahel, Mr. Ryan Crotty, Mr. Thomas Donnell, Mr. Todd Harrison, and Mr. Jim Thomas that the Department of Defense is not investing in the proper resources. Thus, calling for the need to rebalance the Defense budget and reshape the United States military according to the current budget under sequestration.

Ranking Member Rep. Adam Smith (WA-09) asked the witnesses what their three best ideas were to save money. The witnesses agreed that base closures, personnel cuts (including altering the current retirement plan and healthcare system), and reducing weapons programs that are consuming the budget, specifically the F-35 project, were the most cost-efficient reforms.

All the witnesses were in agreement that the budget needs to be assessed according to short term and midterm risks, which means stop placing cuts on the active duty forces and readiness funds.

### **HOUSE VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE HEARING ON THE VA BUDGET REQUEST FOR FISCAL YEAR (FY) 2016**

**By Adam Bernstein, Legislative Intern**

On February 11, 2015, Secretary Bob McDonald, as well as other senior members of the Department of Veterans Affairs, testified before the House Veterans Affairs Committee on their budget request for Fiscal Year (FY) 2016. In total, the President is requesting \$168.8 billion for 2016, \$5 billion more than 2015 and a 7.5% increase in the VA's total funding. The Secretary attributes this increase to hiring more personnel to improve efficiency, transforming the VA's record system from paper files into electronic files, updating old and outdated VA facilities, and the increase in mental health and Agent Orange claims which demand attention. In addition, Secretary McDonald claimed the new Veterans Choice Act will lead to some added costs to private practices that may charge different rates for different services.

Rep. Mike Coffman (R-CO) was not impressed by the VA's budget proposal. He expressed his distaste for the VA seeming to continue to "gloss over" its mistakes. McDonald fired back, stating that he wants to focus on the future of the VA and not dwell on the mistakes of its past. Kaufman's questioning quickly became hostile, especially when the discussion moved to the poorly managed hospital construction projects in Colorado and in Las Vegas.

Following the Secretary and several undersecretaries' testimony, the committee called up several veterans service organizations including: the VFW, the American Legion, AMVETS, and the Disabled Veterans of America. The committee asked the representatives what their members are experiencing with the VA's new programs. All of them stated that it seemed that the new measures taken by Secretary McDonald were effective.

### **ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS FOR SUMMER INTERNS**

AUSN is currently accepting applications for Summer 2015 internships. While at AUSN, Legislative Interns will assist the Legislative Director in not only performing administrative tasks, but also with day to day operations of the office. AUSN Legislative Interns will track and monitor upcoming Congressional hearings. In addition, in cases where the hearings are not televised or streamed online, the interns will go to Capitol Hill and take notes and monitor the hearings of the Senate/House Armed Services Committees, Senate/House Defense Appropriations Committees,

Senate/House MILCON&VA Appropriations Committees and the Senate/House Veterans Affairs Committees. Afterwards, the Legislative Director will review After Action Reports (AAR's) before distribution to Executive Director and AUSN staff. Along with this responsibility, interns will proofread letters to Members of Congress from the Legislative Director, Capitol Hill Blog and Legislative Alerts before either the Legislative Director or Intern posts to the website.

Interested candidates can submit a cover letter, resume and 1-2 page writing sample to the Director of Legislation and Government Relations, Mr. Edgar Rodriguez at [edgar.rodriquez@ausn.org](mailto:edgar.rodriquez@ausn.org). AUSN internships are part-time ranging from 2-3 days a week, and Metrorail travel reimbursement is available to interns as well as free parking at our office in Alexandria, VA.

### **AUSN LEGISLATION INFORMATION**

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 log in 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!

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

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**Featuring Rear Admiral Peter A. Gumataotao, USN, Commander, Naval Surface Force Atlantic**  
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