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AUSN MONITORS HOUSE FLOOR DEBATE ON FY15 DEFENSE APPROPRIATIONS BILL

*On 18 June 2014, the House of Representatives began debate on the **\$570.4 billion** Fiscal Year 2015 (FY15) Defense Appropriations spending bill (H.R. 4870) under a modified open rule, which permits any member to offer amendments but places a time limit of 10 minutes for debate. Overall, the bill is **\$200 million** more than requested by the president. The legislation would provide **\$789 million** to refuel the USS *George Washington* (CVN-73) aircraft carrier. It also includes **\$5.8 billion** for 38 F-35 aircraft, and **\$975 million** for 12 EA-18G Growlers aircraft. The measure includes a 1.8 percent wage increase for service members, which exceeds the president's request of 1 percent, but matches the pay raise in the House-passed National Defense Authorization Bill (NDAA) for FY15. The bill also includes only a placeholder of **\$79.4 billion** for overseas operations in Afghanistan because the White House has not yet submitted its detailed war request. This delay has drawn criticisms from lawmakers on both sides of the aisle who urged the Obama administration to send the proposal to Capitol Hill.*

FURTHER READING:

Appropriations for non-war spending are consistent with the discretionary defense cap established by the Bipartisan Budget Act (BBA) of 2013, and are **\$202 million** above President Obama's funding request. The FY15 Defense Appropriations Bill allocates **\$5.8 billion** for 38 F-35 aircraft, **\$951 million** for two Littoral Combat Ships, **\$789 million** for the Refueling and Complex Overhaul (RCOH) of the USS *George Washington* (CVN-73), and **\$222 million** for the development of a made-in-America liquid-fueled rocket engine for satellite and other launch needs. Additionally, the bill includes a 1.8% wage increase for service members, which exceeds the President's request of a 1% increase, but matches that of the Employment Cost Index (ECI).

Several amendments adopted in the 18 June House floor debate include a **\$5 million** allocation for multiple sclerosis research, **\$500 thousand** to assist with outreach efforts to homeless and other hard-to-reach Veterans in need of treatment for PTSD, an increase of **\$10 million** in the allocation for mental health programs, and **\$5 million** shifted from Army Guard personnel accounts to Operations and Maintenance (O&M) accounts to station soldiers along the southwest boarder. Additionally, Representative Juan Vargas (D-CA-51) is offering an amendment that would prohibit the use of funds in the act to implement a final decision affecting the home basing of F-35 Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) aircraft on the West Coast of the United States until the Government Accountability Office (GAO) submits to the Congressional defense Committees a comparative financial analysis of home basing F-35 aircraft at Naval Air Facility El Centro and Naval Air Station Lemoore.

For more details, see [AUSN's Capitol Hill Blog on House Floor Debate of FY15 Defense Appropriations Bill](#).

HOUSE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE HEARING ON COAST GUARD READINESS

*On 18 June 2014, the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee (HTIC) Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Subcommittee held a hearing concerning the major acquisition programs of the United States Coast Guard (USCG), the sustainability of those programs, and the fiscal constraints which it is facing. The witnesses present at the hearing were Vice Admiral (VADM) Charles Michel, USCG, Deputy Commandant for Operations, Ms. Michele Mackin Director of Acquisition and Sourcing Management at the Government Accountability Office (GAO), Mr. Ronald O'Rourke, Specialist in Naval Affairs at the Congressional Research Service (CRS), and Mr. James H. Offutt, National President of the Navy League of the United States. The hearing began with opening statements from HTIC- Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Subcommittee Chairman, Representative Duncan Hunter (R-CA-50), Ranking Member, Representative John Garamendi (D-CA-03), VADM Michel, and Ms. Mackin. Chairman Hunter began by emphasizing the challenges which the Coast Guard is facing, as it is not able to perform at the necessary level or readiness and capability due to the President's budget cuts and the Administration's refusal to invest in necessary equipment acquisition and other needs in order to ensure mission performance. Chairman Hunter also mentioned that looking forward, the cost of acquisition is never to exceed **\$1.2 billion**, which is about **\$1 billion** less than the GAO reported was needed to complete the missions tasked to the Coast Guard. One of the issues was that a Capital Investment Plan (CIP) for Fiscal Year 2015 (FY15) – Fiscal Year 2019 (FY19) had yet to be submitted, and in the past had failed to accurately report costs. On the morning of the hearing, however, the plan was submitted to Congress.*

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

In his opening statement, VADM Michel spoke of the increasing challenges facing the Coast Guard in this tight fiscal environment, and how the USCG's responsibility of protecting the off shore and coastal realms of the United States is being put into jeopardy due to a lack of appropriations. He also notified the Subcommittee that the 7th National Security Cutter (NSC) had begun construction, and the 6th was completed. He voiced the USCG's desire to build a modern day, heavy duty Polar Icebreaker, and in the meantime reactivate Polar Sea until the new vessel is up and running. For 223 years the USCG has safeguarded America's coast, as VADM Michel pointed out, and the challenges they are facing are evolving. Ms. Mackin focused on the affordability of the USCG's acquisition portfolio in her opening remarks. She pointed out that the NSC created an incredible significant increase in the budget, when the USCG really cannot afford its recapitalization program to begin with. Ms. Mackin's recommendation for the Coast Guard is to develop a long term fleet modernization plan in order to decide what is realistically feasible with the budget the USCG is provided, and what is not. Chairman Hunter joked after the opening remarks that he was going to serve as the referee between the witnesses, for it was clear that VADM Michel believed the USCG was being realistic about their budgetary needs and was present in order to emphasize the need for greater funds, and Ms. Mackin was coming from a perspective which focused upon realistic feasibility and strict numerical data. The second panel saw Mr. O'Rourke and Mr. Offutt at the witness table. Mr. Offutt emphasized in his opening remarks that since 9/11 the responsibilities of the USCG have grown, and acquisition must be seen as a priority. Mr. Offutt stated that he would like to see 1 FRC produced every quarter, or 4 a year. Mr. O'Rourke's opening statement was short and mirrored many of the comments previously stated concerning the fiscal constraints on the Coast Guard.

The Chairman then began with his own questioning, in which he referenced the need for a new Mission Needs Statement (MNS) to be submitted from the USCG. With the last MNS being submitted in 2004, it was about time it was updated and resubmitted to match the fiscal realities of the present day. He stated that "the revised MNS needs to be budget conscious. This means the Administration either needs to identify what missions the Coast Guard will no longer do, or how they intend to pay for the increase in assets and capabilities needed to meet current and future missions." He criticized the previous MNS, saying that he wants to see a "real" one and not one that is a wish list with a "pie in the sky" attitude. It should include risk based priority, and needs to reflect not only what the USCG needs to complete its missions, but that request must also be within the restraints of its budget in order to achieve success and effectiveness. Ranking Member Garamendi asked when the new MNS would be submitted, to which VADM Michel stated approximately 18 months. Ranking Member Garamendi clarified that the problem that the USCG is facing is that Congress had not provided them with the correct resources, which VADM Michel agreed with as the USCG has no appropriating powers. Ranking Member Garamendi asked him to "help us help you" by informing Congress with exactly what the USCG needs and when it needs it.

Representative Tom Rice (R-SC-07) asked what the current budget request from the President was and what the top priority project for the USCG is today. VADM Michel responded that the President's Budget (PB) allocated **\$1.1 billion** to the USCG, when in reality it would need around 2 billion to complete all of the responsibilities granted to it by Congress. He also stated that surface vessels and the recapitalization of those is the top priority. The USCG fleet is one of the oldest in the world, and needs to be kept strong and capable of performing its tasks. There are 49 patrol boats owned by the USCG, and they are slowly being replaced by Fast Response Cutters (FRC), 9 to 10 of which are in service. Ms. Mackin added here that the MNS needed to be redone for all of the reasons above, and she would like to see a CIP in line with the acquisition baseline requirements. Representative David Jolly (R-FL-13) was most concerned with the state of quality of life for Coast Guard personnel, which VADM Michel stated was a matter of prioritization, for while he would like to give his personnel better house and quality of life, the surface assets are most important right now. In this light, Representative Steve Southerland (R-FL-02) asked what missions and stated needs of the USCG were non-essential in order to understand what missions most needed to be funded. However, VADM Michel was unable to answer the question, stating that it was asking him to either focus on issues such as blocking 20 metric tons of cocaine from coming on shore, or sending resources elsewhere to protect from another issue. All of them are essential, and it is a matter of choosing the greater of the evils to go after. With that the first panel of the hearing concluded.

Representative Janice Hahn (D-CA-44) asked Mr. O'Rourke about the mission need of a new Polar Icebreaker and how that was to be funded, to which the witness responded that the goal is to fund that project through an interagency budget. Chairman Hunter then returned to the subcommittee room and emphasized his desire once again to see a fiscally restrained MNS. He asked about the necessity of pulling in resources from US Southern Command, as certain issues such as protecting the U.S.'s fisheries have not been attended too. The witnesses were not enthusiastic about the idea of pulling those resources, but rather emphasized again the need to appropriate funds for USCG acquisition. Finally, Representative Hahn spoke of how there are many threats that we are not even sure of at this time, but that still expect the Coast Guard to respond to even under fiscal restraints. But she also recognized that nothing thus far had been classified as non-essential, and while she was sympathetic to the needs being requested, emphasized that greater prioritization was necessary.

HOUSE VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE HEARING ON NON-VA HEALTHCARE OPTIONS

On 18 June 2014, the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs (HVAC) held its hearing on the continued issue of Veterans being unable to receive healthcare and how to remedy this through the use of Non-VA healthcare options. The witnesses present at the hearing on the first panel were Mr. David McIntyre Jr., President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of TriWest Healthcare Alliance, Rear Admiral (RADM) Thomas Carrato, USN (Ret.), President of HealthNet Federal Services, and Ms. Kris Doody, CEO for the Cary Medical Center. The second panel included Mr. Randy Williamson, Director of Healthcare at the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), and Mr. Philip Matkovsky, Assistant Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Administrative Operations at the Veterans Health Administrations (VHA). The hearing was held by HVAC Chairman, Representative Jeff Miller (R-FL-01), and the HVAC Ranking Member, Representative Mike Michaud (D-ME-02). The HVAC began its hearing with opening remarks made by the Chairman, Ranking Member, and all witnesses. Chairman Miller expressed his concern over the number of Veterans who were not provided the care they had earned or deserved and who had waited weeks, months, and even years for care from VA hospitals. He stated that providing Veterans care, whether through the VA or Non-VA facilities, should be the goal and he claimed not to advocate for the dismantling of the VA, but rather for the VA to augment capacity with Non-VA healthcare facilities in order to meet the needs of veterans. Ranking Member Michaud remarked on his concerns of the cost effectiveness of using Non-VA healthcare options, but stated that, "Non-VA care must be part of the integrated solution," regarding VA healthcare options available to Veterans.

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

Next, the witnesses spoke whereby Mr. McIntyre testified on behalf of TriWest and their contract to serve VA through the implementation of their new program, the Patient Center Community Care (PC3). He stated that this program will work to build and maintain networks of health care providers who agree to render care to Veterans. This network currently provides nearly 70,000 specialty providers to Veterans, with more growth to be expected. Similarly, RADM Carrato argued for augmented short-term solutions for Veterans care, and stated his support for the network of community based providers established under PC3. Ms. Doody also expressed her support for PC3, stating that Veterans should be able to receive local care rather than having to travel hundreds of miles to the nearest VA facility. In the second panel, Mr. Williamson stated that to ensure the quality of Non-VA care, focused oversight remained necessary as well as better communication with Veterans on Non-VA care. Mr. Matkovsky called for an increased use of Veterans care in local communities through Non-VA care and recommended increased funds towards the quality and timeliness

of this care.

Following these opening remarks Chairman Miller deferred to the Committee members for rounds of questioning. Representative Phil Roe (R-TN-01) opened by asking for a VA referral on the timeline involved with recommending VA patients to PC3 Non-VA care. Mr. McIntyre commented that in the VA processing of care outside the VA, the VA is responsible for contacting PC3 and then PC3 finds the needed service and returns the information to the VA whereupon receiving the information, the VA provides medical documentation to PC3 regarding the patient. After the patient's scheduled appointment, the documentation is then returned to the VA. Representative Ann Kuster (D-NH-02) called for extending arrangements of this care throughout the country as models of Non-VA care for Veterans as well as a way to eliminate Veterans' fears of Non-VA healthcare. Representative Beto O'Rourke (D-TX-16) expressed his support for the use of Non-VA healthcare options to alleviate the demands on the VA, but questioned whether or not the private sector would be able to handle certain issues such as PTSD in the same way as a VA facility. However, the witnesses offered that there was no evidence to suggest this to be true. Further questioning by the Committee revealed further problems with the VA and its 14 day scheduling goal as unrealistic, especially in rural areas because of smaller staffs and doctor availabilities. Ms. Doody called for a new 30 day goal to replace the 14 day goal, claiming it to be more reasonable. Additionally, the Committee questioned the use of a VA waitlist over referral to Non-VA care, stating the issue to be an inexcusable one. Mr. Williamson and Mr. Matkovsky stated that criticism over the use of Non-VA care as well as the lack of better wait time data played a role in the use of the VA waitlist.

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS, DEFENSE SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING ON FY15 BUDGET

On 18 June 2014, the Senate Appropriations Committee, Subcommittee on Defense (SAC-D) held a hearing on the President's Budget (PB) request from the Department of Defense (DOD) for Fiscal year 2015 (FY15). The hearing was presided over by SAC-D Chairman, Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL), and acting Ranking Member, Senator Susan Collins (R-ME), who filled in for Senator Thad Cochran (R-MS). The witnesses included Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) Chuck Hagel, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), General Martin Dempsey, USA, and Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller) Robert Hale. In his opening statement, Chairman Durbin went over the 2012 attacks on Benghazi, addressed the tough calls that need to be made concerning the budget, and the Overseas Contingency Operation (OCO) that has yet to be submitted and how this leaves Congress with the difficult task of figuring out our military needs without many answers. Finally, he stressed that sequestration still needs to be solved and how DOD will continue to make investments in our military and personnel during such a strained budgetary environment.

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

Secretary Hagel then gave his opening statement in which he thanked the committee for their continued support to keep our troops ready. SECDEF Hagel then spoke to the quickly changing stability of the world, using examples like Iraq and Ukraine. SECDEF Hagel stated that OCO is being finalized now and there are reasons it is late. The OCO request will take on a few new issues, such as **\$5 billion** for a new counterterrorism account and **\$1 billion** for a European support initiative account. He also said he wished to focus on 2 critical areas when it comes to the military budget: reduce the size of the military structure and simplify the TRICARE system. General Dempsey gave his opening statement in which he addressed that the U.S. is regarded as the world's best hope for stability. However, ongoing sequestration in 2016, he said, will make the military less ready and prepared for future and when portions of the budget are rendered untouchable, like military compensation, readiness pays the bill and risks will become unmanageable.

Chairman Durbin opened the round of questioning by asking if the United States needs to work with Iran in order to stabilize Iraq and how that relates to Afghanistan. SECDEF Hagel responded by stating that it is not comparable at all to Afghanistan. He continued on to state that we need to look at the common interests of Iran and Iraq, (like the oil not the terror organizations). The issues facing the countries are region and religious issues and very complicated and classified. Another important question Chairman Durbin asked towards General Dempsey was if the U.S. troops were ready if Russian President Putin attacked our allies in NATO. General Dempsey responded by saying that he does not think we are ready due to already strained resources upon our military. Another notable question came from Senator Collins asking about the urgency and priority of saving the girls kidnapped by the terror organization *Boko Haram*. General Dempsey replied by stating that we cannot just invade sovereign countries, but it is a high priority to save those girls. The last question asked by Chairman Durbin was about the discount that Servicemembers get on tobacco products. General Dempsey replied by stating that Servicemembers chose a unique lifestyle and that tobacco is still a legal product and the Joint Chiefs need to have a voice in this matter. The Chairman then thanked Robert Hale for all his service as it was his last budget hearing, and then he adjourned the meeting.

AUSN ON THE HILL

First, AUSN would like to welcome our new staffer to the Legislative Department, Mr. Michael Little! Mr. Little, a drilling Navy Reservist, will be AUSN's Legislative and Veteran Services Assistant and has a wealth of knowledge of Veteran issues impacting our Veteran Community having done similar work for the New York State Senate.

This week, in addition to monitoring Congressional hearings, AUSN met with professional staff of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee (SVAC) Chairman, Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT), to discuss moving forward and conferencing the recently passed Senate compromise Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) healthcare overhaul bill, S. 2450, with the various House passed bills. It appears a formal, rather than informal, Conference is in the works and could meet as soon as the end of the month, in which case a formal Conference Report will be released on a compromise bill between the Senate passed bill and the various House passed bills. On 17 June 2014, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) issued a preliminary estimate on the House version of a bill that would provide additional medical treatment to veterans that could further complicate an expected conference with the Senate. The CBO said the measure (H.R. 3230), could eventually cost **\$54 billion** a year if fully implemented, compared to a Senate version (S. 2450) that would cost **\$50 billion** a year. As written, the House bill would, for two years, expand medical treatment provided to veterans from private providers. Comparing the House and Senate bills, the CBO said it appears the House measure would allow more veterans to get medical care over the first two years than the Senate bill, raising the cost of the House version. If the House plan were in effect for two years, it would cost an estimated **\$44 billion** over 2014 to 2019, CBO said, adding that almost all of the additional costs would be discretionary. Despite the higher potential costs of the House bill, it apparently increases deficits by far less as written because it works within the normal discretionary appropriations process and doesn't provide a new mandatory appropriation like the Senate bill. AUSN recently signed onto a [letter with other Military Service Organization's \(MSOs\) and Veteran Service Organizations \(VSOs\)](#) regarding considerations for Conferees of a negotiated House and Senate VA bill, and will continue to monitor developments of the House and Senate measures as they approach eventual Conference consideration.

Also, earlier this week, AUSN had a productive meeting with staff of Representative J. Randy Forbes (R-VA-04) and Representative Susan Davis (C-CA-53), the co-chairs of the Congressional Navy and Marine Corps Caucus, to discuss future collaborative efforts. In addition, AUSN participated in a roundtable discussion brief, hosted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), on the Asia-Pacific Theater rebalance and the future of the U.S. military in the region. The roundtable featured guest Members of Congress, Representative J. Randy Forbes (R-VA-04) and Representative Colleen Hanabusa (D-HI-01) and moderated by Dr. Michael Green, the Senior Vice President for Asia and Japan Chair for CSIS and Associate Professor for Georgetown University.

PRIORITY BILLS INTRODUCED THIS WEEK

S. 2468, Veterans Emergency Health Safety Net Expansion Act of 2014. Introduced by Senator Mazie Hirono (D-HI), the bill would amend Title 38, United States Code, to expand eligibility for reimbursement for emergency medical treatment and to require that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) be treated as a participating provider for the recovery of the costs of certain medical care.

H.R. 4863, National Guard and Reserve Equal Access to Legal Services Act. Introduced by Representative John Kline (R-MN-02), the bill would amend Title 10, United States Code, to provide certain members of the Reserve Components of the Armed Forces who are victims of sex-related offenses with access to a special victims' counsel.

H.R. 4861, Commission for our Veterans' Care Act. Introduced by Representative Denny Heck (D-WA-10), the bill would establish a Commission on Access to Care to undertake a comprehensive evaluation and assessment of access to health care at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

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 was one new Legislative Alert 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 #113-45: RATIFY Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)

NEXT WEEK OUTLOOK

Next week, the House and Senate will be in session. Expected to be considered is a possible Conference negotiation between the House and the Senate on Veterans legislation, although this could be postponed to after the 4th of July Congressional Recess. Also to be considered would be a more solid time table for when the Senate Appropriations Committee, Subcommittee on Defense (SAC-D) is expected to markup its Fiscal Year 2015 (FY15) Defense Appropriations bill, scheduled for sometime in July. Also, the Senate may consider, pending time, the FY15 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs (MILCON/VA) bill which passed out of the Senate Appropriations Committee (SAC) last month. In addition, AUSN will be monitoring a few hearings next week, including a hearing by the House Veterans Affairs Committee (HVAC) on Evaluating Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Care to Veterans, a House Armed Services Committee Hearing on Department of Defense (DOD) Acquisition, and will be participating in a roundtable discussion at the Veterans Health Administration (VHA).

CALL FOR AUSN NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTIONS FOR 2014 ANNUAL MEETING

2014 National Legislative Resolutions will be considered at AUSN's Annual Business Meeting 19-20 September 2014 at the United States Navy Memorial in Washington, D.C. Resolutions must be timely, concise, and include sufficient background information. Resolutions must be submitted at least 30 days in advance of the 2014 Annual Business Meeting in order for proper staffing, review, and formatting as needed. Any member may propose a resolution which should address a legislative or policy issue related to the missions and goals of our organization. Resolutions are received, reviewed, and processed by the Resolutions Committee.

Proposed resolutions should be sent to the AUSN Headquarters, Resolutions Committee Chair, CDR Bill Manofsky, USN (Ret.). Submissions can be sent via e-mail to: Anthony.Wallis@ausn.org or by U.S. mail to: Attn: National VP of Government Relations and Resolutions Committee Chair, CDR Bill Manofsky, USN (Ret.); Association of the United States Navy; 1619 King Street; Alexandria, VA 22314.

To request a new resolution or amend an existing Resolution, see [last year's 2013 Resolutions](#), please visit the ["How to Format Resolutions"](#) section of the website with a downloadable form to fill out and send as well. Current NEW Resolutions needed, for example, include the CH-53K "King Stallion," the E-2D "Advanced Hawkeye," and the MQ-8 "Triton." Current amendments to an existing Resolution needed, for example, include the Military Pay Raise to match Employment Cost Index (ECI) - amendment bullet to Resolution 34, and Restoration of Cost-of-Living-Adjustment (COLA) calculations for retirees who joined the service prior to 2014 as a result of the Bipartisan Budget Act (BBA) of 2013- amendment bullet to Resolution 35.

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS/CONCERNS

Anthony A. Wallis, Legislative Director
Phone (o): 703-548-5800, (m): 703-517-9310
E-mail: Anthony.Wallis@ausn.org
Legislative Action Center: [Contact Congress](#)