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*"AUSN would like to extend its thoughts and prayers for those individuals and loved ones impacted by the senseless shootings at the Washington Navy Yard this week. We are all part of one Navy family."*

### **AUSN CONTINUES TO MONITOR CR DEBATE AS GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN LOOMS**

A growing group of Conservative House Members announced earlier this week that they intend to force a vote this month to defund “Obamacare” and, as a result, the chances that all U.S. agencies will find themselves defunded when Fiscal Year 2014 (FY14) arrives on 1 October 2012 appear to be on the rise since this threat holds up and delays further consideration of the Continuing Resolution (CR) debate, which was expected to occur in the House earlier this week. As it stands now, the CR could be voted as early as today, 20 September 2013, or as late as early next week. This all depends on how the “Obamacare” provision by Conservative House Members plays out and if it stalls further consideration and/or halts passage of the CR. The current CR, which was expected to be debated in the House this week but facing difficulty in a compromise between the two parties, is in the form of [H.J. Res 59](#), which would fund the Federal government until 15 December 2013.

This short-term CR, approximately 2 and a half months long and at 2013 funding levels, include **\$602 billion** for national defense programs, including **\$518 billion** as a “base budget” and **\$85 billion** in war expenditures. The **\$518 billion** is **\$19.9 billion** more than the **\$498.1 billion** that is allowed in the current Budget Control Act (BCA) of 2011 law for national defense programs, meaning that **\$19.9 billion** will have to be sequestered, mostly from the Pentagon budget, starting on 1 January 2014. According to the Secretary of the Navy (SECNAV), Ray Mabus, this would result in a “hollowing” of the force. SECNAV Mabus has recently stated that, “In another 12 to 18 months, we will have Sailors and Marines deploy without all the training they need... Through no fault of their own, they will be less ready to face whatever comes over the horizon.” Naval responses to unpredictable crises may be slowed as a result of the sequester. These cuts could also force the Navy to cancel 34 ship availabilities, scrap 25 airplanes, and halt construction for four ships in the upcoming fiscal year, which starts in three weeks.

Congressional Democratic leadership says they would support a spending bill which would alleviate some of the cuts implemented in the BCA. According to Democratic leadership, an ideal compromise would include new revenue and alternative spending cuts, replacing the sequester. Rep. Chris Van Hollen (D-MD-08), the Ranking Member on the House Budget Committee, announced late last week that he plans to introduce a Democratic alternative to the CR that would replace automatic budget constraints set to continue into Fiscal Year 2014 (FY14). The bill would replace sequestration in FY14), which otherwise would automatically curtail discretionary spending by about **\$91 billion**, with a combination of spending cuts and tax increases. Representative Van Hollen's proposal would fund the government

through 15 November 2013 and would set an annual rate of spending of **\$1.058 trillion**. A Congressional Republican alternative to the current CR would block funds for two years of implementation of the health care law, which would alienate Democrats while attracting conservative votes in the House. According to Representative Mike Simpson (R-ID-02), a delay in implementation may be more palatable for Obama and Congressional Democrats than completely cutting off funding, especially considering that the White House has pushed back some requirements for a FY14 program start on its own. However, White House Press Secretary Jay Carney has said, “We will not accept anything that delays or defunds Obamacare.” Thus a showdown between Congress and the Administration is already beginning to take shape in the days ahead before the 1 October 2013 deadline.

Details can be found at [AUSN's Capitol Hill Blog on the CR debate](#).

## HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE HEARING ON PLANNING FOR FY14 SEQUESTRATION & SCMR

On 18 September 2013, the House Armed Services Committee (HASC), held a hearing titled, “Planning for Sequestration in Fiscal Year 2014 (FY14) and perspectives of the Military Services on the Strategic Choices and Management Review (SCMR).” The witnesses present were the members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) which included General James F. Amos, Commandant of the Marine Corps (CMC), Admiral Jonathan W. Greenert, Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), General Raymond T. Odierno, Chief of Staff of the Army, and General Mark A. Welsh III, Chief of Staff of the Air Force. The hearing was held by HASC Chairman, Representative Howard ‘Buck’ McKeon (R-CA-25), and HASC Ranking Member, Representative Adam Smith (D-WA-09).

The HASC hearing began with opening remarks made by the Chairman, the Ranking Member, and members of the JCS. Chairman McKeon began by stating that the purpose of this Committee hearing was to discuss the effects of sequestration on national security. He added that while his hope is to avoid sequestration that the Department of Defense (DOD) should plan and prepare for another round. He further mentioned his disappointment in the lack of specificity in the Strategic Choices and Management Review (SCMR) provided to the Committee by the Joint Chiefs last July. Ranking Member Smith warned of the dangers of sequestration especially with the looming concern over the debt ceiling. He also requested that the Joint Chiefs discuss how to restructure the military’s strategic choices. General Odierno began the JCS testimony by discussing the need for the military budget to keep the full range of options open for the Commander in Chief. He further emphasized how the Budget Control Act (BCA) of 2011, with the sequestration trigger, is not going to work for contingency requirements resulting in degraded readiness, thus creating substantial risks in carrying out just one sustained operation. Admiral Greenert then began his opening remarks by addressing concerns that cost control was a possibility coupled with contractor vulnerability, also alluding to the shooting at the Washington Navy Yard. He assured HASC Members that the military does not allow cost control measures to affect security. He did mention, however, that the current budget situation under sequestration reduces readiness, causes delays in acquisition and maintenance, and would allow only one Carrier Strike Group (CSG) and one Amphibious Assault Group (AAG) to remain ready for contingency operations at any given time. He stated that there are numerous missions that the Navy cannot perform and without the proper funding, the Navy cannot provide a proper forward presence. In addition, General Amos also voiced concerns for modernization and care for infrastructure under sequestration funding levels and mentioned that if funding is not increased, Marines are looking at a 6 month deployed, 12 month stateside rotation.

Following these opening remarks Chairman McKeon deferred to the Committee members for questioning and comments. Ranking Member Smith inquired about the effect a Continuing Resolution (CR) would have on military strategic choices. Admiral Greenert responded that the Navy will have no new start projects and that since the CR levels would be limited to prior year funding, there would be no way to address cost increases on an already tight budget. In addition, when asked about specific programs, all the Joint Chiefs reiterated that they would have to look carefully at their budgets and figure out the best way to complete their mission. Admiral Greenert went on to say that, “more reductions imposed by sequestration and the limitations of a [Continuing Resolution] will compel us to take certain budget savings steps,” such as canceling the planned buy of a *Virginia* Class attack submarine (SSN) in 2014, as well as one Littoral Combat Ship (LCS) and afloat forward staging base. “Each of these would further worsen the reduction in fleet size,” Admiral Greenert emphasized. He also warned of a need to delay the start of work on the first *Ohio* Class ballistic-missile submarine replacement known as the SSBN(X) in 2021 by one year. “This would cause us to be unable to meet U.S. Strategic Command presence requirements when the *Ohio* Class SSBN retires,” he warned. Representative J. Randy Forbes (R-VA-04) highlighted that the biggest political elephant standing in the way of a deal that would lessen or void the remaining nine years and around **\$450 billion** in sequester cuts, is that some members, and even some Congressional leaders, have shown no interest in turning off the across-the-board cuts to non-exempt federal accounts.

## **HOUSE VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE HEARING ON VA OVERSIGHT**

On 19 September 2013, the House Veterans' Affairs Committee (HVAC) held a hearing to examine concerns about transparency and efficiency in the Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA), focusing particularly on the time needed to process and respond to requests for information by the Committee. The witness called was the Honorable Joan Mooney, the Assistant Secretary for Congressional and Legislative Affairs at the VA. The hearing was called by HVAC Chairman, Representative Jeff Miller (R-FL-01), and HVAC Ranking Member, Representative Mike Michaud (D-ME-02).

The Committee opened the hearing with remarks from Chairman Miller, who explained that the VA's response to requests by the Committee had been highly inadequate. He explained that testimony is required 48 hours in advance of a hearing, and that in the past, VA has not responded to the need for testimony in a timely manner. The same, he said, has occurred with information requests, mentioning a case of an information request that has been pending for 52 weeks. Additionally, in the case of an outbreak of Legionella at a Pittsburgh VA facility, the media received information while the request by the Committee for similar information went unanswered. Finally, he noted that since 2009, the VA's Office of Legislative Affairs has received a roughly 40% increase in both funding and staff. He asserted that Veterans deserve an open, honest, and transparent VA. Ranking Member Michaud echoed many of these sentiments, and added that while there are, at times, legitimate disagreements between the Committee and the VA, but these must be communicated to be effectively addressed, and he added that the VA should adopt a "yes-we-can" attitude and be proactive. He emphasized that the VA is a customer service organization.

Ms. Mooney began by saying that the Committee and VA have a shared goal to serve our nation's Veterans, and she recognized the frustration that the Committee had experienced. She noted that her office had supported 80,000 information requests over the last year, and said that while requests are prioritized, it is sometimes not possible to process them within specific time constraints, such as the 48-hour rule for testimony, particularly for complex issues or when given short notice. Chairman Miller pointed out that of the 21 requests for testimony this year; only 11 were received on time. He asked who is responsible for meeting these deadlines and asked Ms. Mooney to evaluate her office's performance. Ms. Mooney took responsibility for this, and said that the VA intended to work harder to meet these goals.

Throughout the hearing, many HVAC Members asked about specific requests for information on issues brought to them by constituents that had either gone unanswered or had been significantly delayed. This included the 52 week ongoing wait that Chairman Miller addressed in his opening remarks. Nearly every Member who asked questions on the subject agreed that such wait times were unacceptable and hindered the Committee in its ability to service veterans. In nearly every case, Ms. Mooney assured the members that she would address their concerns in the near future, and that all requests were forthcoming. Ms. Mooney also explained that some information requests, particularly those that concern legislative positions, must be run by the VA's Office of Management and the Office of General Counsel, which could contribute to delays in the process. Other specific issues that were addressed was the VA's lack of an effective tracking system for information requests, and the unclear nature of determining who is responsible for ensuring that a request is processed in a timely manner. When asked at the end of the hearing to rate the VA's performance in these areas, Ms. Mooney responded, "a B- or C+" and resolved to perform better in the future and to meet the time and content expectations of the Committee in information requests.

## **AUSN ON THE HILL**

In addition to monitoring hearings and the CR debate unfold this week, AUSN had a few meetings with Members of Congress this week, including Representative Jim Bridenstine (R-OK-01), who himself is a Navy Reservist, and Representative Duncan Hunter (R-CA-50). Both meetings were with AUSN's Legislative Director as well as new Executive Director, VADM John Totushek, USN (Ret.), and discussed the future Navy and impact the CR and continued sequestration would have. AUSN also had regular National Military and Veteran Alliance (NMVA) and the Military Coalition (TMC) Guard and Reserve Committee meetings to discuss movement on Veteran bills of interest in the last remaining months of the 1<sup>st</sup> session of the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress. Finally, AUSN closed its acceptance of Resolution submissions and changes for its Annual Business Meeting, being held next week, which the Resolution Committee is expected to break out and meet to form AUSN's legislative objectives and priorities for next year.

## **PRIORITY BILLS INTRODUCED THIS WEEK**

*No significant legislation introduced this week.*

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**

Earlier this week, the House was supposed to begin consideration of the Fiscal Year 2014 (FY14) Continuing Resolution (CR), however due to certain circumstances that has erupted into controversy about adding certain provisions (as addressed above), the House has canceled its planned recess week next week in order to stay in town and ensure the CR passes if it doesn't this week and start negotiating a measure that would raise the government's borrowing authority. But that bill, too, will probably contain a number of policy riders that Democratic Members will not accept. One of the possible provisions that could set off partisan gridlock next week if it becomes part of the debate: a proposal to exempt the Pentagon from sequestration. The argument being if the Pentagon becomes exempt, why not other agencies as well which are facing sequestration. There are a few hearings next week, pending the Congressional schedule on the CR and debt ceiling debate, which AUSN will be monitoring. Also, next week AUSN will be meeting with the Chief of Legislative Affairs for the Navy as well as the Chief of Navy Reserve to discuss Navy concerns moving forward under a CR and sequestration. Finally, AUSN will be having its Annual Business Meeting (formerly Annual Conference) here in Old Town, Alexandria VA. During the meeting, AUSN will be discussing and voting on adoption of Legislative Resolutions that have been submitted by AUSN members and to be added to our National Legislative Resolutions. Submissions have been closed for this year as of last week, but overall we received about 10 New Resolution submissions and 5 significant bullets/edits to our current standing Resolutions.

#### **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS/CONCERNs**

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