



## In This Week's Legislative Watch:

[AUSN LOOKS AT 'HINTS' OF WHAT WILL BE IN FY15 PRESIDENT'S BUDGET REQUEST](#)  
[HOUSE VETERANS' AFFAIRS, HEALTH SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING ON VA ACCOUNTABILITY](#)  
[HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS, MILCON/VA SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING ON QUALITY OF LIFE](#)  
[HOUSE ARMED SERVICES, MILITARY PERSONNEL SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING ON DHA](#)  
[HOUSE VETERANS' AFFAIRS, ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING ON VR&E](#)  
[HOUSE ARMED SERVICES, SEAPOWER SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING ON PACIFIC REBALANCE](#)  
[AUSN ON THE HILL](#)  
[PRIORITY BILLS INTRODUCED THIS WEEK](#)  
[NEW LEGISLATIVE ALERTS](#)  
[NEXT WEEK OUTLOOK](#)

### **AUSN LOOKS AT 'HINTS' OF WHAT WILL BE IN FY15 PRESIDENT'S BUDGET REQUEST**

*On 24 February 2014, the Secretary of Defense (SECDEF), Chuck Hagel, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), General Martin Dempsey, USA, held a press conference on forthcoming Fiscal Year 2015 (FY15) President's Budget (PB) request, confirming and denying certain rumors that have been spun the past few months. If what they stated is what to be expected in the PB rollout, starting 4 March 2014, then this FY15 Budget request will be one of the most comprehensive cuts to military personnel and equipment in modern history. AUSN takes a look at this cut suggestions within the PB which include cutting commissary benefits, increasing TRICARE fees, cutting military pay, cutting Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) benefits, dramatically cutting Marine Corps end strength numbers, cutting our Navy cruiser (CG) fleet and making drastic reductions to the Littoral Combat Ship (LCS).*

#### **FURTHER READING:**

Various media reports and Congressional and Department of Defense (DOD) rumors of what the President's Budget (PB) for Fiscal Year 2015 (FY15) will include have been circulating over the past few weeks as the deadline, 4 March 2014 for its partial release and 11 March 2014 for its full release, rapidly approaches. While the PB as a whole is getting scrutinized, it is the recommendations regarding DOD's budget that has had the most hints illuminated about it. Supposedly, DOD's Budget is estimated to be **\$496 billion**, which, according to media sources, would be the lowest level of defense spending that the U.S. has had since 1940. The FY15 PB is also expected to recommend several overarching changes to DOD's Budget. One such recommendation is asking Congress to approve another round of Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) in 2017. While not proposing any changes to the military retirement benefits system, the PB is recommending that there be a one-year pay freeze for DOD senior military leaders and a 1% basic pay rise for military personnel. In addition, the PB is expected to propose cutting subsidies for commissaries within the Continental United States (CONUS), a move that would phase down the amount of support they receive from **\$1.4 billion to \$500 million** over the next few years (this does not affect the Overseas (OCONUS) commissaries). However, while none of the commissaries will be asked to close, this reduction in subsidies does mean that the goods sold in the commissaries will have to be more competitive with commercial retail stores, such as Wal-Mart. Finally, it appears that there are also recommendations for raising TRICARE fees spent and placing limits on the increases made to troop's basic allowance for housing (BAH).

Looking at the impact that the FY15 PB will have on the Armed Services, the Navy and Marine Corps do not appear to be coming away unscathed by the new round of reductions in military spending. Starting with the impact the FY15 PB is expected to have on the Marines, several sources report that the overall end-strength of the Corps will be reduced by 8,000 Marines, for a total force size of 182,000 Marines. However, if sequester is not lifted then the end-strength of the force will be a total of 175,000 Marines. Despite the Navy appearing to be the least scathed from the reductions proposed in the FY15 PB, relatively, there are still a few concerns that may manifest themselves in the next few weeks. While rumored to be in the PB originally, the latest details that have surfaced maintain the Navy's aircraft carrier fleet at 11 ships. However, the PB does not include funding for the midlife Refueling and Complex Overhaul (RCOH) of the carrier USS *George Washington* (CVN-73); instead DOD will make a decision on whether to cut an aircraft carrier from the fleet in 2016, something AUSN will monitor closely. While the carriers make it through untouched, the Navy's cruiser fleet is being cut in half, with 11 of the 22 cruiser (CG) fleet being taken out of service until funds are available for modernization. However, the most dramatic of cuts to the Navy comes in regards to its newest addition to the fleet, the Littoral Combat Ship (LCS). While just a rumor before, SECDEF Hagel confirmed suspicions about a cut recommended in a memo by Acting Deputy Secretary of Defense (DEPSECDEF), Ms. Christine Fox, that recommended reducing the LCS program from an original buy of 52 ships down to 32, a cut of 20 ships to a platform that was supposed to be a sizable portion of the Navy's fleet!

Details can be found at [AUSN's Capitol Hill Blog on Hints of FY15 Budget Request](#).

#### **HOUSE VETERANS' AFFAIRS, HEALTH SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING ON VA ACCOUNTABILITY**

*On 26 February 2014, the House Veterans Affairs Committee (HVAC), Subcommittee on Health held a hearing on VA Accountability, assessing actions taken in response to ongoing Subcommittee oversight. There was one panel of witnesses consisting of The Honorable Robert Petzel M.D., the Under Secretary for Health at the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). He was accompanied by: Dr. Robert Jesse, Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Health at the VHA, Dr. Madhulika Agarwal, Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Policy and Services at the VHA, Dr. Rajiv Jain, Assistant Deputy Under Secretary for Patient Care Services at the VHA and Phillip Matkovsky, Assistant Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Administrative Operations at the VHA. The hearing focused on concerns that the VA was not holding itself and its employees accountable for gaps in healthcare, especially when Congressional oversight and request had been placed for improvements.*

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

The hearing began with opening testimony from the HVAC, Subcommittee on Health Chairman, Representative Dan Benishek (R-MI-01), Ranking Member, Representative Julia Brownley (D-CA-26), and Dr. Petzel. Chairman Benishek expressed concern that the VA was not doing enough and expressed hope that his bill, H.R. 2072, the Demanding Accountability for Veterans Act of 2013, would help to improve this lack of accountability. He noted that in recent years, the VA has not done much to hold itself accountable beyond concurring with Inspector General (IG) and Government Accountability Office (GAO) reports, setting up internal VA performance standards with no measures for accountability. Next, Ranking Member Brownley expressed her concern about the over prescription of opioids as painkillers and was interested in how the VA was dealing with the increase in military sexual trauma claims over the last year. Additionally, Ranking Member Brownley noted the long delays in the delivery of medical equipment to local VA facilities when it is needed and requested. In his opening statement, Dr. Petzel noted that the VA has developed an opioid safety program to help identify high risk situations for long term use and that they have completed performance and productivity standards for 81% of VA specialty physicians and 100% of standards will be instituted by the end of the fiscal year, 30 September 2014.

Following opening statements, Chairman Benishek began the first of several rounds of questioning by asking Dr. Petzel if he viewed preventable deaths at VA facilities credible evidence towards a lack of meeting performance standards and what has been done to hold those responsible accountable. Dr. Petzel responded that in the last year, 3,000 VA employees were removed which totaled 1% of their total nationwide workforce and that in certain instances, criminal investigations prevented the Department from taking action until the conclusion of the investigation. Ranking Member Brownley asked Dr. Agarwal what specialty performance standards still need to be created and Dr. Agarwal responded that performance standards are still needed for the specialties of, among others, thoracic surgery, cardiovascular, and anesthesia.

Representative Brad Wenstrup (R-OH-02) then asked Dr. Petzel about the efficiency of the VA as compared to the private health sector, to which Dr. Petzel said he would take the VA's efficiency to match the private sectors any day. At this point Chairman Benishek interrupted saying that was an utterly ridiculous statement as motivating staff at the VA level is an extremely difficult and major problem. Representative Ann Kuster (D-NH-02) asked what was being done to fix the delay in procuring and acquiring life saving devices to local VA facilities. Dr. Petzel responded that the bundling concept causes delays in the supply chain and that a compromise must be struck between lowering costs via bundling and between establishing acceptable procurement speed. Mr. Matkovsky also noted that the VA is reviewing its supply chain and is finishing up testing a supply chain which relies on 21 regional network offices to help supply facilities rather than single supply centers in Chicago, IL.

#### **HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS, MILCON/VA SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING ON QUALITY OF LIFE**

*On 26 February 2014, the House Appropriations Committee (HAC), Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs (MILCON/VA) held a hearing on the quality of amenities provided to the military such as family services, recruiting, retention, and transition, as well as and what challenges the Congressional Military Family Caucus faces. The witnesses present at the hearing were Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy (MCPON) Michael D. Stevens, USN and Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps (SgtMajMC) Michael Barrett, USMC. The hearing was held by HAC- MILCON/VA Chairman, Representative John Culberson (R-TX-07), and Ranking Member, Representative Sanford Bishop (D-GA-02). The witnesses pointed out the strain the military has been under the last 13 years ranging between the work being done in Afghanistan, sequestration, the Federal government shutdown, furloughs, and the effects of budget reductions upon readiness and morale.*

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

The HAC- MILCON/VA Subcommittee hearing opened with remarks from Ranking Member Bishop. He talked briefly about the need for high quality facilities, equipment, force structure, and strategy in the military, but emphasized that the true measure of a high quality of life in the military was how the servicemembers and their families are being supported day-to-day. This support, which begins at home, is found in the programs offered to address issues such as employment, education, physical and mental health. The need for these family support services available to the military is comparable, and even more important, to the same standards as the need for equipment, training, and strategy. The witnesses' testimonies provided critical analyses of the successes and challenges of the programs available to servicemembers and their families. Despite the numerous budget hurdles our military has faced, MCPON Stevens was able to give high remarks on programs such as family housing and barracks, wounded warrior care, health services and family support resources like providing for child care. The biggest constraint, however, on running these programs efficiently was working with a much smaller budget. He stresses that this can hinder efforts to support servicemembers of the Navy and other branches as well. MCPON Stevens said that while the Sailor's quality of life is high overall, "our Sailors also carry a burden of uncertainty, especially in the current fiscal environment." He asked the Subcommittee to address the potential pay and compensation changes while providing better predictability of deployment lengths. It was the overall consensus of the witnesses that the physical and mental welfare of servicemembers not become a casualty of budgetary uncertainty. In his opening statement, SgtMajMC Barrett stressed that the top priority of the military is still to be the nation's crisis response force and in order to properly fulfill this place in our Nation's society, issues of military quality of life must be adequately addressed.

Following the witnesses' testimonies, Chairman Culberson asked the Subcommittee members to begin their rounds of questioning addressing military quality of life and the consequences of ongoing fiscal uncertainty. Chairman Culberson began by asking the witnesses what the top three priorities the Subcommittee must address to face these issues and include in future legislation. The witnesses agreed that the focus of legislation should be on recruiting, retaining, and transitioning members of our Armed Forces respectfully. Without these three components, the quality of life in the military will dwindle and they will be unable to sufficiently serve their duty to the United States. Not only is recruiting the best-qualified men and women for our military a top priority, but MCPON Stevens spoke to the importance of adequately housing these recruits when Representative David Valadao (R-CA-21) asked about the quality and conditions of the barracks being built after the Navy had suffered fiscal restraints. MCPON Stevens went on to respond that sequestration has greatly affected the budget and that creating Q1 and Q2 (Quality 1 and Quality 2) housing was not feasible under the current fiscal environment. He also pointed out to Representative Valadao that LeMoore Naval Air Station fell within his area of responsibility and that he must know just as well the troubles which construction has faced in the past year. SgtMajMC Barrett echoed the response, stating that while each branch's issues are unique in execution, they all suffer from the same issues and affect all servicemembers. Thus, SgtMajMC Barrett encouraged the Subcommittee to engage more aggressively in ensuring the highest quality of life in the military.

## **HOUSE ARMED SERVICES, MILITARY PERSONNEL SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING ON DHA**

*On 26 February 2014, the House Armed Services Committee (HASC), Subcommittee on Military Personnel held a hearing concerning issues of accountability and transparency for the new Defense Health Agency (DHA) which was established fall 2013. On 1 October 2013, the Department of Defense (DOD) established the DHA to manage the activities of the Military Health System (MHS). These activities include those previously managed by the TRICARE Management Activity (TMA), which was dis-established on the same date. During the past several months, all TMA websites changed to reflect the new DHA. The witness panel was made up of three individuals: Dr. Jonathan Woodson, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs at DOD; Lieutenant General (Lt Gen) Douglas J. Robb, USAF, Director of DHA, and Ms. Brenda S. Farrell, Director of Defense Capabilities and Management at the Government Accountability Office (GAO). The hearing was presided over by HASC- Military Personnel Chairman, Representative Joe Wilson (R-SC-02), and Ranking Member, Representative Susan Davis (D-CA-53).*

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

Chairman Wilson began the hearing stating that the DHA needed to address its response to the recommendations made by the Government Accountability Office (GAO). This was requested by the Chairman in order to give a better understanding of the current and projected staffing levels at DHA, and elaborate on its unclear cost/savings assessment. Ranking Member Davis then gave her opening statement, where she stressed the need for the DHA to have high levels of accountability and transparency in the early stages, especially due to the high costs associated with DOD health care and the continuation of sequestration. Each of the witnesses then presented their opening statements. Dr. Woodson began by stressing that integrating care services improves survival rates and quality of services. He said that one of the major goals of the DHA was to modernize the management structure, and that the organization found the suggestions of GAO to be helpful. Lt Gen Robb testified that DHA was the product of 18 studies conducted over 50 years, which found that a unified DHA was the best option to improve effectiveness and efficiency with the least amount of costs and disruption. He explained that the role of the DHA was to be a support agency to help the individual service branches' health organizations meet their goals. Ms. Farrell, from the GAO, reported that the DHA still had work to do coming up with an accurate projection of the staffing requirements the agency would need, developing clear cost/savings estimates, and providing detailed performance measures. This, she said, would be hard for the agency to do because they did not have the proper baseline assessments needed to make such a calculation.

Chairman Wilson opened up the hearing to rounds of questioning beginning with one of his own. When asked about the results of the cost analysis on DHA by DOD, Dr. Woodson replied that the DHA had secured so far an estimated **\$80 million** worth of savings, which he emphasized was ahead of their planned projections. Ranking Member Davis asked Ms. Farrell if she was satisfied with the analysis and cost/savings reports compiled by the DHA at the suggestion of the GAO. Ms. Farrell replied that due to the fact that the DHA had not done a baseline assessment, to her knowledge, of the current staffing numbers, it could not give an accurate assessment of whether DHA's staffing needs would increase or decrease. Representative Joe Heck (R-NV-03) asked whether sequestration had caused any problems in the implementation of DHA, to which Dr. Woodson replied while the past year had been challenging, it had been a way of forcing DHA to stay cost-effective.

## **HOUSE VETERANS' AFFAIRS, ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING ON VR&E**

*On 27 February 2014, the House Veteran's Affairs Committee (HVAC), Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity held a hearing on the effectiveness, challenges, and best practices of VA's Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) Program regarding recent reports from the Government Accountability Office (GAO). The witnesses present at the hearing were divided into two panels. The first panel consisted of Mr. Daniel Berti, Director of Education, Workforce, and Income Security at the GAO, Ms. Heather Ansley, Vice President of Veterans Policy at VetsFirst, and Mr. Paul Varela, Assistant National Legislative Director for the Disabled American Veterans (DAV). The second panel was dedicated to Mr. Jack Kammerer, Director, of the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Service at the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The hearing was held by HVAC-Economic Opportunity Chairman, Representative Bill Flores (R-TX-17), and Ranking Member, Representative Mark Takano (D-CA-41). VR&E is available to transitioning Veterans for 12 years after their service and the main objectives include maximizing rehabilitation for Veterans, assist in finding gainful employment, and to provide independent living aid to the Veterans which qualify.*

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

The hearing opened with remarks by Chairman Flores and Ranking Member Takano. Chairman Flores briefly described the objectives of VR&E and the recommendations made recently in a GAO analysis of the program's effectiveness. In these remarks, the conclusions of the GAO analysis were summarized to include key recommendations to HVAC: focus on employment through long-term service, widen the independent living aid scope, and increase oversight of VR&E. The witnesses' testimonies touched on each of the recommendations and expanded on what is further needed from this program to run more efficiently and with greater effectiveness. Mr. Bertoni opened by outlining the weaknesses of VR&E, namely the limitations to rehabilitation and the lack of proper resources to Veterans. His statistics, from a future outlook study, revealed that the average time it takes for Veterans to find employment falls around 4.5 years and 1/4 of the Veterans transitioning out took 7-10 years. He further commented that if they discontinued or interrupted their programs, the process takes longer. Those with mental health conditions were yet another variable which extended the amount of time it will take to be gainfully employed. Thus, Mr. Bertoni, and the other witnesses, urged against limiting the program to only a 12 year period. Another limitation, highlighted in Mr. Bertoni's testimony, referred to the lack of VA Counselors to Veterans ratio, which results in Counselors not adequately assisting Veterans, and more importantly, lacking the expertise to assist disabled Veterans. Mr. Bertoni recommends a balance of cases to staff workload and training to counselors for educational and vocational training. The second panel was meant for the VA to provide testimony as to how VR&E is changing and addressing the GAO analysis. Mr. Kammerer spoke to the recommendations and expressed assurance that the VA is working with Federal, state, and private actors to effectively evaluate the full scope of VR&E activities. The goals of VR&E remain to find and retain suitable employment for Veterans and provide aid to them for independent living.

Following the witness opening statements, Chairman Flores allowed Subcommittee members to begin rounds of questioning. One of the first questions came from Representative Julia Brownley's (D-CA-26) concerns for paralyzed Veterans. Representative Brownley asked the witnesses how to improve the independent living program and not be adversely affected by the financial cap set by legislation. Ms. Ansley of VetsFirst responded that, "if someone is meeting the need, why would we limit based on an arbitrary cap? Support the independent living program being awarded as needed." Ms. Ansley believed that caps should be removed as disabilities do not last for only 12 years, but for their lifetime. Representative Ann Kirkpatrick (D-AZ-01) also asked Mr. Kammerer how can there be a seamless transfer and at what point is the VA beginning to reaching out to servicemembers? Mr. Kammerer responded that they are working to be able to address Veterans as much as possible and provide VA Counselors on the military bases to reach out once they are ready to begin their transition. Ranking Member Takano then asked Mr. Kammerer how the VA is addressing the lapse in knowledge between assisting the physically disabled versus the mentally disabled Veteran. Mr. Kammerer replied that not only are Master's degrees in counseling required, but specific training and experience are needed to formally refer someone to the proper mental health services. He also pointed out the partnership with the VHA and their vital programs which provides mental health assistance and recognizes that mental health rehabilitation is critical to Veterans. At the end of the hearing, recommendations and conclusions were drawn from the line of questioning and testimonies of the panels. What were found were the weaknesses highlighted by the witnesses and GAO analyses are high on the VA's priority list. According to Mr. Kammerer's testimony, they are being responded to with a very specific response in mind.

#### **HOUSE ARMED SERVICES, SEAPOWER SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING ON PACIFIC REBALANCE**

*On 27 February 2014, the House Armed Services Committee (HASC), Subcommittee on Seapower and Projection Forces held a hearing regarding methods of supporting the Asia-Pacific Rebalance effort and hearing from expert witnesses on the progress of this pivot strategy, outlined in the 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance. Notable witnesses included; Mr. David Berteau, Senior Vice President and Director of International Security Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Dr. Thomas Mahnken Professor of Strategy at the U.S. Naval War College (NWC), Dr. Ely Ratner, Senior Fellow and Deputy Director of the Asia-Pacific Security Program at the Center for a New American Security, and Admiral (ADM) Patrick Walsh, USN (Ret.), Senior Fellow at the Tower Center at Southern Methodist University. The main subjects covered included the rise of regional state actors such as China, the perceived lack of U.S. strategy in the Asia-Pacific region, complexities of forming such a policy, and the effects of fiscal constraints on America's ability to maintain the balance of regional power and implement an Asia-Pacific strategy.*

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

HASC- Seapower and Projection Forces Chairman, Representative J. Randy Forbes (R-VA-04), began the hearing noting his concerns with maintaining the power balance in the Southeast Asia-Pacific region and stress he was looking forward to hearing expert testimony from experts comprised of think tank members and academia within the realm of

international security and foreign affairs. Opening statements began with ADM Walsh. He began by explaining how that the Asia-Pacific region was becoming increasingly unbalanced due to aggression displayed by China. He stated that this was partly indicated by the fact that no country in the region was downsizing its navy, rather China's has been on the rise in recent years. The situation is further complicated by the lack of a mutually agreed upon legal framework for the law of the sea within which countries can operate efficiently. He made a comparison to the law of the air, which has this type of agreed upon framework. The development of such a system could, according to the ADM Walsh, reduce territorial ambiguity and bring stability to the region. The beneficial aspects of more stability were detailed by Dr. Mahnken, an academic expert on international security. Greater stability would ensure the free passage of goods and services across common areas, which is especially important considering the high levels of regional and trans-Pacific economic activity. Dr. Mahnken continued by explaining that U.S. forces have several main goals within the Asia-Pacific region. These goals are to reassure allies of American commitment to regional security, the deterrence of aggressors, and the retention of the ability to win fights in the event of conflict. Without the support necessary to accomplish these objectives, there are threats to America's political and military credibility in the region amongst its allies. Subsequently, our forces would face greater risks moving forward. In an effort to accomplish these goals without damaging credibility, Dr. Mahnken detailed three possible options. First, U.S. forces could uphold the status quo by maintaining fewer bases, yet continuing investments in short-range assets. Second, by trimming commitments in the region, U.S. forces could trade operational risk for strategic risk. Third, it would also be possible for U.S. forces to close gaps in current strategic commitments by investing in elevated capabilities in undersea warfare, heightened collaboration with allies in intelligence and reconnaissance, and an expansion of overall capabilities. Finally, Mr. Berteau furthered these points with his own recommendations. His ideas were to expand forward military presence, strategic alliances, diversified military capabilities, and an expansion in the capabilities of host nations.

Next, HASC- Seapower and Projection Forces Ranking Member, Representative Mike McIntyre (D-NC-07) offered several more possibilities within the realm of elevated host nation capabilities and cooperative security. His suggestion was that America's close ally in the region, Australia, presented great opportunity for a multilateral security agreement with Australia as the head nation state. He mentioned that there are already discussions underway concerning agreements with smaller states such as Thailand, Vietnam, and the Philippines. ADM Walsh followed up on this point by stating that regardless of military capability, the U.S. has the ability to lead within the international community, which is something that China cannot do. He suggested that China would be deterred from further aggressive behavior by seeing the U.S. acting in conjunction with other nations in the region.

### **AUSN ON THE HILL**

This week, in addition to monitoring Congressional hearings and preparing for the release of the Fiscal Year 2015 (FY15) President's Budget (PB), AUSN was very active on and off Capitol Hill. First, earlier this week, [AUSN was featured in an Op-Ed piece in Roll Call Newspaper](#), looking at the effect current and future budget cuts have on overall military readiness, morale and our nation's Veterans. There were also many briefs that AUSN participated in this week, including a brief on the TRICARE West region management by United Healthcare and how they are continuing to review their customer service to TRICARE beneficiaries, a brief on the Littoral Combat Ship (LCS) by industry leaders given recent PB information being released and a brief on mefloquine exposure to servicemembers and Veterans by experts from John Hopkins University. AUSN also participated in numerous meetings this week including with staff of Representative Joe Heck (R-NV-03), staff of the Navy's Office of Legislative Affairs (Navy OLA) and attended a breakfast forum with Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) where AUSN had time to discuss future Navy programs and the LCS built in northern Wisconsin.

Finally, AUSN participated in a [press conference](#), standing with other Veteran Service Organizations (VSO's) such as the Disabled American Veterans (DAV), Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) and others, on S. 1982, the Comprehensive Veterans Health and Benefits and Military Retirement Pay Restoration Act of 2014, as well as an amendment, Senate Amendment #2755, by Senator John Boozman (R-AR) and Senator Mark Begich (D-AK). The amendment, being debated with S. 1982, would have provided the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) advanced appropriations that would, amongst other things, keep ALL VA operations funded in case of a Federal government shutdown. However, by Thursday, the bill had failed on a procedural vote on the Senate floor. The bill was derailed by raising a budget point of order challenging outlays for Veterans. Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee (SVAC) Chairman, Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT), noted in a [press release](#) that a motion to advance the bill won by a vote of 56-41, but opposing Senators invoked a rule that required 60 votes to proceed, thus the bill did not pass the rule. AUSN was disappointed, but will be working with other organizations on pushing an alternative path to getting the majority of the

provisions within S. 1982 through the Senate through other legislative means.

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

**H.R. 4110, (Official title yet to be released).** Introduced by Representative Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX-18), the bill would amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to provide a tax credit to encourage private employers to hire Veterans, to amend Title 38, United States Code, to clarify the reasonable efforts an employer may make under the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) with respect to hiring Veterans.

**H.R. 4102, (Official title yet to be released).** Introduced by Representative Jeff Miller (R-FL-01), the bill would amend Title 38, United States Code, to clarify that the estate of a deceased Veteran may receive certain accrued benefits upon the death of the Veteran.

**H.R. 4101, The Timely Information Management Enforcement (TIME) Act.** Introduced by Representative Renee Ellmers (R-NC-02), the bill would amend Title 10, United States Code, to ensure that a TRICARE beneficiary receives written notice of any change to benefits received by the beneficiary under the TRICARE program.

**H.R. 4096, American Heroes COLA Act of 2014.** Introduced by Representative Jon Runyan (R-NJ-03), the bill would amend Title 38, United States Code, to provide for annual Cost-of-Living Adjustments (COLA) to be made automatically by law each year in the rates of disability compensation for Veterans with service-connected disabilities and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation (DIC) for survivors of certain service-connected disabled Veterans.

**H.R. 4095, Veterans Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) Act of 2014.** Introduced by Representative Jon Runyan (R-NJ-03), the bill would increase effective as of 1 December 2014, the rates of compensation for Veterans with service-connected disabilities and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation (DIC) for the survivors of certain disabled Veterans.

**H.R. 4068, SCRA Rights Protection Act of 2014.** Introduced by Representative Walter Jones (R-NC-03), the bill would expand the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (SCRA) by requiring the consent of parties to contracts for the use of arbitration to resolve controversies arising under the contracts and subject to provisions of such Act and to preserve the rights of servicemembers to bring class actions under such Act.

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 #113-35: SUPPORT S. 1982 & Boozman-Begich Amendment, Advanced Appropriations for VA**

**Legislative Alert #113-36: SUPPORT H.R.4068 and S. 1999, the SCRA Rights Protection Act of 2014**

#### **NEXT WEEK OUTLOOK**

Next week, Congress will be in session and preparing for the official release of part I of the President’s Budget (PB) request for Fiscal Year 2015 (FY15). Since the PB will be released in two parts, one next week and the other the week of the 10 March 2014, AUSN will be doing a brief look through analysis next week, followed by a more comprehensive analysis report the following week. The full PB analysis report by AUSN will be available to AUSN members through our website once we have finished combing over the PB request with a fine-toothed comb. In addition to this initial budget release, AUSN will be actively engaged on Capitol Hill. Early next week, AUSN will be re-engaging staff of the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee (SVAC) to discuss options with the untimely failure of S. 1982, the

Comprehensive Veterans Health and Benefits and Military Retirement Pay Restoration Act of 2014, and looking at other options to move forward and get the Senate to pass a comprehensive Veterans bill. In addition, AUSN will be at the Pentagon celebrating the Navy Reserve's birthday with the Chief of Navy Reserve (CNR), VADM Robin Braun, USN and many other guests. As the week unfolds, AUSN will be meeting with Senator Ron Johnson (R-WI) and his staff, staff of Representative Tim Walz (D-MN-01) and staff of the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) - Seapower Subcommittee. Finally, AUSN will be presenting written testimony to a Joint House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee hearing next week on Thursday.

**QUESTIONS/COMMENTS/CONCERNS**

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