

NewsBytes
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Another Partial Government Shutdown Avoided?

As *NewsBytes* goes to press lawmakers are rushing to pass a more than 1100-page appropriations (spending) bill (H. J. Res. 31). It would fund approximately 25 percent of the government before today's midnight deadline to avert another partial government shutdown. The bill includes the appropriations for nine different departments, including the Department of Homeland Security, which provides funding for the U.S. Coast Guard. The Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs are already fully funded. Three weeks ago, Congress passed a Continuing Resolution (CR) to end the 35-day partial government shutdown, the longest in history. During that shutdown, active duty Coast Guard went without pay, but were paid after the government re-opened. If the shutdown would have continued Coast Guard retirees would have also been impacted.

President Trump indicated he will sign the legislation into law. The FRA has been reminding legislators that during the government shutdown, members of the Coast Guard continued to safeguard our waterways. They blocked attempts to smuggle illegal drugs and contraband into the country, all without pay.

FRA supports the "Pay Our Coast Guard Act" (S.21/H.R.367). It would provide continuing appropriations to the U.S. Coast Guard during any period that interim or full-year appropriations for the Coast Guard are not in effect. Members are encouraged to use the Action Center to ask their legislators to support these bills.

FRA Staff on Capitol Hill

NED Thomas Snee, DLP John Davis, NSD Chris Slawinski and a few other Military Coalition (TMC) Policy Committee co-chairs met with the Senate Armed Services Personnel Subcommittee staff for an off-the-record meeting to discuss upcoming congressional issues. The group discussed concurrent receipt expansion, guard and reserve issues, commissary and exchange reforms, expected burial limitations at Arlington Cemetery and the need for adequate oversight of privatized military housing. The Pentagon FY2020 proposed budget will be delivered to Capitol Hill on March 12th.

Senior Enlisted Go to Capitol Hill

Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy (MCPON) Russ Smith, Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps (SMMC) Ronald Green and the Army and Airforce counter parts testified before the House Appropriations Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Subcommittee (MilCon/VA). They addressed quality of life issues for the active duty enlisted. MCPON Smith told lawmakers that sailors and their families need more child care services, improved infrastructure and continued funding to modernize the personnel system. "While we currently have the most capable ships and leading- edge technology, our greatest edge in battle against any determined adversary will always be the asymmetric advantage that is provided by our people," Smith said in his opening remarks.

SMMC Green told the subcommittee that housing and infrastructure are a top priority for his service, as more than 1,000 Marine families remain displaced from their homes as the result of two hurricanes last year. "The need to get their facilities up and running, the resources they need to have safe homes is paramount," Green said.

Military Housing Concerns Discussed

Senate Armed Services Committee subcommittees (Readiness & Personnel) held a joint oversight hearing on allegations of substandard housing. Military Family Advisory Network released a survey of active duty personnel shows that 56 percent of the more than 17,000 respondents, reported a "negative" or "very negative" opinion of their living conditions, which the Network concluded showed a "systemic problem." Many families claim health concerns and repairs have become "all-consuming" for many families, diverting their focus from military duties and upcoming deployments. Much of military base housing was privatized in the mid-1990s due to deplorable conditions with government managed military housing. As several Senators noted that we have come full circle with this issue. Concerns include mold, lead paint, raw sewage, and other toxic exposures that have health impact for all residents, many of whom are young children. Also termites and rodents were reported.

Members of the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Readiness hosted a roundtable with military families who shared their experiences with privatized military housing. Recent reports from military families to the media have raised serious concerns about conditions in some military family housing.

Reps. John Garamendi (Calif.) and Doug Lamborn (Colo.) Chairman and Ranking Member of the Readiness Subcommittee respectively, made the following statement at the conclusion of the roundtable:

"Today we heard directly from military families about the conditions in some privatized military housing. The concerns they raised about hazardous housing conditions are very troubling. Providing our service members and their families with the quality housing they deserve has always been a

bipartisan priority for this Committee. Today's roundtable was an important part of our oversight of this issue, and will help inform our next steps. Our work is not yet done."

The military spouses who testified during the round table discussion, believe that military families impacted by substandard housing should have the ability to withhold BAH payment until there are improvements. FRA believes service members and their families should have the best housing available, and will continue to support increased oversight and accountability of private companies provide base housing.