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Paratroopers with the 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment, 173rd Airborne Brigade, and Italian army paratroopers conduct mock door exercises before an airborne operation in Pordenone, Italy. (U.S. ARMY/PAOLO BOVO)

Budget delays cause ‘severe impacts’

Without proper and timely funding, the Army will face “severe impacts” to its ability to take care of soldiers and their families, remain ready to respond to contingencies and support its modernization efforts, a senior leader told a congressional committee on Wednesday.

Testifying before a House appropriations subcommittee, Army Vice Chief of Staff Gen. Joseph Martin said, “Readiness is fragile,” and advocated for “timely, adequate, predictable and sustained funding. Who knows what tomorrow will bring?”

Martin and other military leaders appealed to members of the defense funding panel to avoid a yearlong continuing resolution—a temporary funding measure that caps spending at last year’s levels and prohibits the

services from starting any new programs.

For fiscal 2022, which began Oct. 1, the military is operating under a continuing resolution that expires at midnight Feb. 18.

Limited funding for a full fiscal year “would adversely affect our soldiers, our readiness, our modernization programs and our infrastructure improvement efforts,” Martin said.

It also harms the Army’s ability to keep up with potential adversaries and “impacts our ability to compete today and compete tomorrow,” he said.

Since fiscal 2010, the military has started all but one fiscal year under a continuing resolution, Martin said.

Under a yearlong continuing resolution, the total impact to the Army could be as high as \$12.9 billion, Martin said.

That figure includes misaligned funds at \$9.2 billion, up to \$1.1 billion in military pay challenges, and \$2.6 billion in impacts across 147 programs and projects, including modernization and military construction and family housing projects.

Among other impacts, the Army would not be able to start 71 new modernization programs and be forced to delay 29 procurement programs, Martin said.

Aviation readiness would suffer because of reduced flying hours, soldiers’ professional military education could be delayed, initial training for a quarter of the second lieutenants coming into the Army from ROTC would be delayed, and the Army faces a \$10.2 million reduction in funding for basic combat training, he said.

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Report: Army must adapt to meet families' changing needs

A new report reveals a changing Army family and the need for increased assessment and data collection to ensure the service is properly supporting and caring for soldiers' families.

There are more than 2.5 million military family members across DoD, according to the Military One-Source 2020 demographics profile. More than 640,000 are family members of active-duty soldiers.

As the Army family continues to change and diversify, the "Health of the Army Family," the first such report released by the Army Public Health Center, calls for DoD policies to capture military families and their unique needs.

"The Army of today is not only comprised of single and married Soldiers and their dependents, it is also comprised of Soldiers in committed long-term relationships, those who co-parent with former spouses or partners, and same-sex couples," the report found. "It is essential to recognize the evolution of family structures and to identify means by which the Army can achieve an inclusive definition of family."

The report includes data and research mostly from 2019 and earlier, but it also highlights the impact of COVID-19 on Army families.

The pandemic "highlights the need for Army family supportive services," according to the report.

It found that just over half of soldiers reported a financial impact from the pandemic, more than 64% reported their spouse or partner was having difficulty coping with the impact of the pandemic, and almost 60% of soldiers with children said their children's daycare or school was closed or operating at reduced hours.

Spousal support

While the report confirms previous findings that spousal support is key to soldier retention, it also identified spouse employment as a key issue for



Family members gather to celebrate a change-of-command ceremony for Lt. Col. Al-twan Whitfield, center, outgoing commander of the 841st Transportation Battalion, at Charleston Air Base, South Carolina. (U.S. ARMY/JULIE KELEMEN)

Army families.

Nearly one in four active-duty spouses reported being unemployed, and even employed spouses reported experiencing lower pay, feeling over-qualified and working fewer hours than desired, according to the report.

"Military spouses are the backbone of the Armed Forces. They keep the home front strong when their service member is away for training, deployment, or attending professional schools," the report found. "Spouse employment is an important Army Family issue, and therefore an important Army issue. For this reason, the DoD has made resources available to help military spouses achieve professional goals."

Closing the gaps

Moving forward, the report found that more demographic and program data are necessary to ensure that Army families' needs are met.

"Gaps remain in knowledge and in the ability to report information on key demographics such as family member age, gender, and location. Numerous gaps also exist in the ability to make direct comparisons between Army Family member

health and comparable civilian populations," the report found. "... There is limited information on which of the many programs, services, and resources available to support the health and quality of life of the Army Family are able to demonstrate effectiveness in improving outcomes or affecting positive change—not that they are ineffective; rather, the information largely does not exist."

Laura Mitvalsky, director of the health promotion and wellness directorate at the Army Public Health Center, described the report as "an important first step" to "understanding, monitoring and optimizing the health, quality of life and readiness of Army families," according to an Army news article.

Army Surgeon General Lt. Gen. R. Scott Dingle said the report is essential to understanding today's Army family and their needs.

"Today's Army family experiences unique challenges, stressors and systems," he said in the Army news article. "It is important to understand the health status of the Army family so that we can ensure their needs are being met and address any gaps."

The report is available here.

Veteran, spouse unemployment rates rise during COVID-19 pandemic



Soldiers, veterans and military spouses attend a job fair hosted by the Association of the U.S. Army at its headquarters in Arlington, Virginia. (AUSA PHOTO)

Veterans and military spouses faced greater and persistent rates of unemployment in 2020, largely because of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a new report.

Released in late November, the fourth annual report by veterans nonprofit Hire Heroes USA looked at the experiences of 46,400 transitioning service members, veterans and military spouses who navigated a job search last year.

Because of the pandemic, the nonprofit saw a 130% increase in the number of virtual events and a 240% increase in the number of virtual event attendees. While there were fewer active-duty registrants, likely due to high military reenlistment rates, a “significantly higher percentage” of registrants self-reported that they were unemployed, the group said.

Additionally, veterans and military spouses reported being unemployed for longer periods of time. On average, veterans experienced unemployment for 16 weeks in 2020, up from 12 weeks in 2019. For spouses, their average time was 20 weeks in 2020, two weeks longer than in 2019.

“Our clients already face unique

challenges in their search for meaningful employment, and the COVID-19 pandemic did not make that search any easier in 2020,” said Hannah Hyde, program evaluation and compliance manager for Hire Heroes USA.

“We were able to implement a wider offering of services for our clients to ensure that they were able to continue their job search safely and effectively. Despite increased unemployment durations, more Hire Heroes USA clients were hired into new positions in 2020 than ever before,” Hyde said.

This latest report also found that while gender disparities in pay still exist, they narrowed in 2020, especially for those in higher ranks.

For example, the lowest pay disparity was found among former field-grade officers. Male field-grade officers earned, on average, \$3,000 more than their female counterparts in 2020. That disparity was more than \$13,000 in 2019.

Overall, 62% of the nonprofit’s clients achieved or exceeded their desired salary—a 6% decrease from 2019.

The full report is available here.

AUSAExtra

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Support For the Soldier

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Funding*From Page 1*

The delays and disruptions create a “compounding effect” that will likely disrupt the Army’s ability to sustain readiness and achieve its modernization goals, Martin said.

Additional challenges include “emerging, unfinanced missions such as COVID-19,” he said.

“Taken together, these factors create a cumulative impact that will be difficult to overcome,” Martin said.

The threat of a yearlong continuing resolution concerns the Association of the U.S. Army.

On Tuesday, AUSA joined with 10 other groups to appeal to Congress to pass on-time funding for national security and defense programs.

In addition to deferring the start of any new programs or projects, under a continuing resolution “funds are misaligned between military services and programs, as activities naturally fluctuate year to year and CRs do not



Pfc. Daniel Candales of the 82nd Airborne Division uses a tactical robotic controller to control the expeditionary modular autonomous vehicle in preparation for Project Convergence at Yuma Proving Ground, Arizona. (U.S. ARMY/SGT. MARITA SCHWAB)

accommodate those changes,” says the joint letter addressed to Democratic and Republican leaders in the Senate and House of Representatives.

The services also are “forced to reduce necessary readiness activities” to pay for cost-of-living and pay and benefits increases. Temporary funding also impacts the defense industry with “seemingly endless stop-and-

start contract cycles, creating inefficiency and disruption,” the letter says.

“It would be a devastating signal to send to our warfighters, their families, our allies and partners, and the dedicated industries that support them, if Congress cannot provide adequate funding for FY22 in a timely fashion,” the letter says.

Read the letter here.

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AUSA seeks to build on NCO, soldier programs in 2022

By Command Sgt. Maj. Troy Welch,
U.S. Army retired

It seems like 2021 was over in a blink of an eye. During that blink, the Association of the U.S. Army's NCO & Soldier Programs team was busy as ever.

Although the pandemic still loomed over us, the NCO & Soldier Programs team was able to conduct and participate in region meetings, Noon Report webinars, podcasts, chapter visits, the AUSA annual meeting and professional development forums.

I won't bore you with numbers. Suffice to say, we put in the hours recording podcasts and hosting Noon Report webinars with Army senior leaders on issues that impact the force. Topics included the Army Combat Fitness Test, modernization, People First and the NCO strategy.

Our team members also traveled to Fort Carson, Colorado, and Fort Hood, Fort Bliss and Fort Sam Houston in Texas to visit local AUSA chapters and conduct professional development sessions.

These trips allowed us to connect with chapter and installation leaders, educate the force about AUSA and inform local businesses about the benefits of partnering with their local AUSA chapter.

Retired Sgt. Maj. of the Army Daniel Dailey, our vice president for NCO & Soldier Programs, is co-chair of the Army chief of staff's retiree council.

In 2021, Dailey proposed to the council the idea of creating the Soldier for Life Network.

This network, if approved, will provide veterans a service similar to Army Knowledge Online, which was disbanded last summer.

AUSA is working closing with the Army to create the network, so stay tuned for more information.

AUSA's NCO & Soldier Programs team also completed the Army's requirements and was approved to par-



Soldiers and NCOs of the 5th Recruiting Brigade stand with retired Sgt. Maj. of the Army Daniel Dailey, AUSA's vice president for NCO & Soldier Programs, during a visit to Fort Sam Houston, Texas. (AUSA PHOTO)

ticipate the Army Skills Bridge Program. We welcomed our first intern, Sgt. 1st Class David Fitzgerald, to the team in October.

This past year, volunteer leaders and members from our 121 chapters across the U.S. and around the world held in-person meetings, the first

ones since 2019.

Our team attended and provided updates on our new ribbon program, the chapter plus challenge and other support programs.

We also helped promote AUSA's "Welcome Back" campaign, which allows new members to join at a discounted rate. For example, Dailey spoke at the AUSA Pikes Peak chapter's membership meeting, where the chapter signed up 30 new members.

This year's AUSA Annual Meeting and Exposition was a great success. Despite fiscal challenges, we can all say the planning, execution, content, attendance and events were all "mission accomplished."

The past two years have been a challenge, and we know our chapters and members have worked hard to push through some tough times. Our team at NCO & Soldier Programs would like to say thank you for continuing to find creative ways to support our soldiers and their families.

Brighter skies are in front of us, and we look forward to a new beginning and a wonderful 2022.

Retired Command Sgt. Maj. Troy Welch is AUSA's director of NCO & Soldier Programs.



Podcasts and Noon Report webinars from AUSA's NCO & Soldier Programs Team in 2021 featured topics such as the Army Combat Fitness Test. (U.S. ARMY PHOTO)

Chapter members assemble baskets for military families

The Association of the U.S. Army's Henry Leavenworth chapter in Kansas recently partnered with the Sergeant Audie Murphy Club Lamp chapter and other local organizations to assemble meal baskets for military families in need during the holiday season.

At the Fort Leavenworth commissary, volunteers filled boxes with supplies including canned goods and produce. Each box contained at least \$50 in items designed to create a holiday dinner for a family, and 108 baskets were assembled at the most recent event.

Henry
Leavenworth

"Chapter members, Armed Forces Insurance and Frontier Community Credit Union, chapter community partners, Sergeant Audie Murphy Club members, post soldiers, [and] Commissary staff all gathered to build 108 holiday food baskets," the AUSA chapter said in a Facebook post. "What a wonderful event to sup-



Volunteers help fill boxes of food for soldiers and families in need Dec. 16 at the Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, commissary. (U.S. ARMY/CPL. RAYMOND BENITEZ-SANTANA)

port that helps our local soldiers and their families."

The commissary organizes the holiday basket assembly each Thanksgiving and Christmas, and chaplains and first sergeants help identify families who might benefit, the *Fort Leavenworth Lamp* reported.

"We just wanted our customers, our

recipients around the holidays to not have to worry about food or bills, and this is just a way to take that extra holiday burden off their plates," said Regenia Singletary, the commissary store manager, according to the *Fort Leavenworth Lamp*. "If we just get them the main staples, [the basket] frees them up to buy regular groceries, buy that extra toy for their child, or that little something that might be more important."

Commissary patrons, vendors and members of the community donated about \$6,000 to create the baskets, and Singletary said she hopes to support more families and veterans in the future.

"A lot of patrons on this post are such givers," she said. "They support this program by buying baskets through the checkout. Some of them will buy \$100 worth every time they come in."

Sgt. 1st Class Ashley Neago, president of the Sergeant Audie Murphy Club Lamp chapter, described the event as a "joint effort."

"Civilians and soldiers, we all need to come together to help, especially if anyone is in need," Neago said, according to the *Fort Leavenworth Lamp*. "I think it's awesome to give to the Leavenworth community and just help them out."

PenFed Credit Union recognized for partnership with AUSA chapter



Tobyhanna
Army Depot

Members of the Association of the U.S. Army's Tobyhanna Army Depot chapter in Pennsylvania present PenFed Credit Union with the chapter's 2021 Distinguished Service Award for over 10 years of community partnership. (AUSA PHOTO)

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