

Combined Federal Campaign a success by Wing standards

Maj. Charles Maes
150th FW Supply Manager

Thanks to everyone for being receptive to the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) and especially to those who actually donated. There comes a time when someone you know such as a family member or a neighbor will need the services of a CFC organization. Your contributions help ensure that these CFC services are available when needed.

Through your generosity, the 150th Fighter Wing exceeded last year's figures and was able to raise more than \$9,600 in contributions for the various organizations listed. Again, thank you for your support. Col. Hunter also wanted me to pass on his appreciation as well.

Reserve and Guard receive unlimited commissary benefits

The Department of Defense announced Nov. 24 that with the president's signing of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2004, effective immediately, the following members and their dependents will be permitted unlimited access to commissary stores.

- Members of the Ready Reserve (which includes members of the Selected Reserve, Individual Ready Reserve and Inactive National Guard) and members of the Retired Reserve who possess a Uniformed Services Identification Card.
- Former members eligible for retired pay at age 60 but who have not yet attained the age of 60 and who possess a Department of Defense Civilian Identification Card.
- Dependents of the members described above who have a Uniformed Services Identification Card or who have a distinct identification card used as an authorization card for benefits and privileges administered by the Uniformed Services.

Guard and Reserve members were authorized only 24 commissary shopping days per calendar year until today when the president signed the National Defense Authorization Act, which contained provisions eliminating the restrictions.

Commissaries have immediately adopted the new provisions, which means Guard and Reserve members will no longer have to present a Commissary Privilege Card when they shop.

2004 pay raise now official

The recently signed 2004 National Defense Authorization Act includes an active duty pay increase of at least 3.7 percent to all military members. Although the average pay raise is 4.15 percent, active duty Warrant Officers and Enlisted personnel will be receiving a pay raise that ranges from 3.7 percent to 6.25 percent with the largest percent-

ages going to enlisted service members E-5 and above. Commissioned Officers will receive a flat 3.7 percent pay raise across the board. The new raises are effective on Jan. 1, 2004, this means service members will see the increase in their 15 January paychecks.

Time off granted to demobilized Reservists

President Bush is granting five days of excused absence, without charge to leave time, to Federal employees who are in the military reserves and returning from active duty. President Bush wrote, "The federal government will continue to be the model for employer support to the Guard and Reserves." The five workdays of excused absence covers employees who were activated for military service in connection with operations Noble Eagle, Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom.

Additionally, pursuant to the 2004 Defense Authorization Act, federal employees will be eligible for up to 22 days of paid military leave if such federal employees are mobilized, but do not leave CONUS. If the mobilized federal employee does serve OCONUS, however, the mobilized federal employee would receive an additional 22 days of paid civil service pay or military pay, whichever pay was the highest of the two categories. The additional 22 days of such paid civil service pay or military pay would be per calendar year, which would be renewed for following calendar years as well. This additional paid civilian service pay or military pay, however, cannot be saved or carried-over from year to year as does conventional accrued leave.

Enhanced TRICARE for Reservists and their families.

TRICARE Buy-In

Guard members who are unemployed or whose employers do not offer health insurance would be able to enroll themselves and their families in the military's TRICARE program on a cost-share basis. A single reservist would pay an annual premium, 28 percent of the annual cost of providing care, amounting to about \$420 annually for single reservists and \$1450 annually for a reservist and his or her family.

TRICARE Upon Receiving Orders

All Guard members, Reservists and their families would be eligible to enroll in TRICARE as soon as members receive activation orders, as opposed to when they are actually activated. This change will smooth and expedite the transition to active service.

Extension of TRICARE Eligibility after Demobilization
All Guard members, Reservists and their families can stay in TRICARE for 6 months after demobilization, whatever their time in service.