



**JOINT READINESS TRAINING CENTER AND FORT POLK
CIVILIAN PERSONNEL ADVISORY CENTER
FORT POLK, LOUISIANA 71459-5341**



*“ARMY CIVILIAN PERSONNEL PROFESSIONALS--
HELPING LEADERS MEET THE MISSION”*

CPAC INFORMATION BULLETIN
NUMBER 28

SEPTEMBER 2000

**ARMY BENEFITS CENTER-
CIVILIAN (ABC-C)**

After a rather rocky start, the Army Benefits Center-Civilian (ABC-C) successfully deployed at this installation. Fort Polk appropriated fund civilian employees are now able to find out about their benefits, make changes, and keep up-to-date on legislative issues by accessing the Employee Benefit Information System (EBIS) at www.abc.army.mil OR the Interactive Voice Response System (IVRS) at 1-877-ARMY CTR (1-877-276-9287) or 1-877-ARMY TDD (1-877-276-9833) for the hearing impaired.

Access to the systems requires employees to enter their social security number (SSN), a Point-of-Entry (POE), and a Personal Identification Number (PIN). The Point-of-Entry (POE) is an additional security level added to help ensure employees' transactions are safe over the EBIS. This is a newly added feature to the ABC-C web site and instructions to assist employees in setting up the new User ID and password are found at the web site.

Included on our web site is the handy reference, "ABC-C Supervisor and Employee Guide" for use by supervisors and employees when processing benefit and

entitlement changes and/or transactions with the ABC-C. Log on at www.jrtc-polk.army.mil/cpac/index.htm to view and print the guide.

Additional training will be offered at a later date on use of the ABC-C, and employees will be informed of any changes to the system as they occur.

**PREMIUM CONVERSION
EFFECTIVE 8 OCTOBER 2000**

**PREMIUM CONVERSION WAIVER
NOTICE**

Employees who opt to waive participation in Premium Conversion must submit the waiver form to the CPAC not later than 6 October 2000. This date replaces the previously published date of 7 October 2000. After 6 October 2000, employees may waive participation in premium conversion (or elect to participate, if they previously waived) only during the annual FEHB open season period, or during the calendar year, if they experience a qualifying life event. Waiver forms are available in the CPAC, and employees may contact Ms. Sherri Collier at 531-4020 to obtain the form.

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Premium conversion is a tax benefit and is automatic unless waived. It allows you to allot a portion of your pay to your employer, who will in turn use that amount to pay your contribution for Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) coverage. This allotment is made on a pre-tax basis, which means that the money is not subject to Federal income, Medicare, or Social Security taxes. The allotment reduces your taxable income, so less tax is withheld, and your paycheck will be larger. The Government will still pay the Government share of premiums as provided in the Federal Employees Health Benefits Act. Premiums are not affected; however, paying health insurance premiums pre-tax will make FEHB coverage more affordable for you.

The method for calculating the tax savings is to multiply an employee's annual FEHBP premium by that employee's tax bracket. For example, an employee who pays \$1600 in premiums for self and family in a year and whose income places him or her in the 28 percent tax bracket and who also pays 7.65% FICA will save \$570.40.

It is unlikely that you will not want to participate in premium conversion. The potential reasons fall under two categories: FEHB rules and Social Security.

RULES

In response to a number of inquiries regarding the effect of premium conversion on the rules governing the FEHB and premium deductions, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has advised that for the most part, it's business as usual. Only a few situations change under premium conversion:

- ◆ An employee participating in premium conversion will not be allowed to cancel coverage or change from self and family to self only unless the cancellation or change is due to a "qualifying life event"

and the request is filed timely OR during an FEHB open season.

- ◆ The deduction for FEHB will be the amount converted to pre-tax. This includes deductions for retroactive coverage, payback of premiums from a prior period of LWOP and other adjustments.
- ◆ At the option of the agency, an employee going on LWOP may be allowed to pre-pay FEHB premiums prior to beginning the LWOP. DFAS has determined that the option to pre-pay when an employee goes on LWOP will not be available in DoD at this time.
- ◆ Reemployed annuitants enrolled in the FEHB Program are eligible to automatically participate in premium conversion, provided they are employed in a position that normally conveys eligibility for FEHB coverage and are in an agency covered by OPM's premium conversion plan.

SOCIAL SECURITY

If you pay Social Security taxes on your salary, the premium conversion may result in somewhat lower Social Security benefits.

To assist you in your decision, visit the OPM web site www.opm.gov/insure/health/pretaxfehb

This site is the first and best source for up-to-date information on premium conversion. OPM has also created a series of questions and answers regarding premium conversion on their web site. We encourage all employees to visit the web site for updates and answers to questions regarding any aspect of premium conversion. If you can't find the answer you are seeking, you can email OPM at fehb@opm.gov and they will respond with an answer.



POLITICAL ACTIVITY

Under the 1939 Hatch Act, Federal employees faced significant restrictions on their ability to participate in political activities. Congress amended the Hatch Act in 1993 to permit more political activity by Federal and D.C. government employees.

With the 1993 amendments, many Federal employees (including Army civilian employees) are now permitted to take an active part in political management or in political campaigns. The penalties for violating the Hatch Act restrictions are very severe. Most violators are subject to removal.

The U. S. Office of the Special Counsel (OSC) is responsible for enforcing the Hatch Act (www.osc.gov/hatchact.htm). The web site has a great deal of information on restrictions and on permissible activities. If you have questions concerning the appropriateness of certain activities you may contact the OSC directly at 1-800-85-HATCH. For information about DOD restrictions on activity that could be interpreted as associating the DOD with partisan political causes, you may contact the Civilian Personnel Advisory Center or the Staff Judge Advocate, Administrative Law Division.

The following list, as compiled by the Office of Special Counsel, contains examples of permissible and prohibited activities for Federal employees:



PERMISSIBLE
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May be candidates for public service in nonpartisan elections• May register and vote as they choose• May assist in voter registration drives• May contribute money to political organizations• May attend political fundraising functions• May attend and be active at political rallies and meetings• May join and be an active member of a political party or club• May sign nominating petitions• May campaign for or against referendum questions, constitutional amendments, municipal ordinances• May campaign for or against candidates in partisan elections• May make campaign speeches for candidates in partisan elections• May distribute campaign literature in partisan elections• May hold office in political clubs or parties including serving as a delegate to a convention

PROHIBITED
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May not wear political buttons on duty• May not use their official authority or influence to interfere with an election• May not solicit, accept or receive political contributions unless both individuals are members of the same federal labor organization or employee organization and the one solicited is not a subordinate employee.• May not knowingly solicit or discourage the political activity of any person who has business before the agency• May not engage in political activity while on duty• May not engage in political activity while wearing an official uniform• May not be candidates for public office in partisan elections



ABSENCES FOR VOTING



Saturday, 7 October and Tuesday, 7 November are upcoming election days. Employees are encouraged to exercise the right to vote. The following guidance will be helpful to managers and employees in assessing necessary arrangements for voting:

a. As a general rule, where the polls are not open at least three hours either before or after the employee's regular work hours, the employee may be granted an amount of excused leave which will permit reporting for work three hours after the polls open or leave work three hours before the polls close, whichever requires the lesser amount of time off.

b. If an employee's voting place is beyond normal commuting distance (75 miles from Fort Polk) and vote by absentee ballot is not permitted, sufficient time not to exceed one work day may be allowed to make the trip, provided a vote is cast.



COURT LEAVE

An employee is entitled to paid time off without charge to leave for service as a juror or witness.

Jury Duty: An employee who is summoned to serve as a juror in a judicial proceeding.

Witnesses: An employee who is summoned as a witness in a judicial proceeding in which the Federal, State, or local government is a party. Court suits between private individuals or companies in which the United States or a state or local government is not involved do not entitle employees to court leave.

Official Duty: An employee who is summoned as a witness in an official capacity on behalf of the Federal Government is on official duty, not court leave. An employee is performing official duty during the period with respect to which he/she is summoned, or assigned by his/her agency, to:

- a. testify or produce official records on behalf of the United States or the District of Columbia; or
- b. testify in his/her official capacity or produce official records on behalf of a party

other than the United States or the District of Columbia.

When an employee is called for jury duty or witness duty, the court order, subpoena, summons, or official request should be provided to the supervisor. When the employee returns to duty, s/he should provide official written evidence of attendance in court showing the dates and hours to support the appropriate recording on the employee's Time and Attendance Sheet.

Court leave can only be granted for those days and hours the employee would otherwise be in a pay status. Employees are to return to work if excused by the court, unless the supervisor determines the employee's return would be impractical. If excused early from jury duty, the employee should contact the supervisor for a determination on their work status for the remainder of the workday. Failure to do so could result in a charge to annual leave, leave without pay, or absence without leave (AWOL) for the excess time involved.

To avoid undue hardship, an agency may adjust the schedule of an employee who works nights or weekends and is called to jury duty. (If there is no jury/witness service, there is no court leave. The employee would be charged annual leave, sick leave, or leave without pay, as appropriate.)

It is Army policy not to request that employees be excused from jury duty on the basis of their employment except in cases of extreme necessity.

Fees/Expenses: Employees must reimburse to their agency fees paid for service as a juror or witness. However, monies paid to jurors or witnesses which are in the nature of "expenses" (e.g., transportation) do not have to be reimbursed to the agency.

WOMEN'S EQUALITY DAY

This year's Women's Equality Day was championed by the CPAC and was celebrated on August 24th at the Main Post Chapel. The program included a musical celebration and parade of historical costumes.



Parade of Costumes

Fort Polk was honored to have Mrs. Larris J. Marks, FORSCOM, Director of Civilian Personnel as the guest speaker. Mrs. Marks spoke on the history of the suffrage movement, the legacy it created and the need to rededicate ourselves to set higher goals and building a better future for our daughters and granddaughters. A note of thanks to all who participated and helped to make the celebration a grand success.

Women's Equality Day is one of many cultural and educational celebrations observed by the Fort Polk workforce each year.



ARTICLES FOR BULLETIN

If you have suggested topics or articles you would like addressed in future bulletins, submit them to:

Civilian Personnel Advisory Center
7041 Radio Road
Fort Polk, LA 71459-5341
ATTN: Bill R. Chance or
Nora Fletcher

Or you can call 531-4020/4708. If at all possible, suggested topics will be addressed.

//ORIGINAL SIGNED//
DONALD R. MALLETT
Director, Civilian Personnel
Advisory Center

