
Defense Report

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For Government Employees—A Ceiling on Pay Raises But Not on Their Charitable Contributions

As is true in any part of the United States where there is a large concentration of Federal activity, the military personnel and civil service workers in the Washington, D.C. area contribute a major portion of the funds collected each year for the United Fund or whatever it might be called locally. Even among military personnel who have no permanent roots in the community, the spirit of giving to make life easier for the less fortunate, is notable for its generosity.

But this year the Combined Federal Campaign for the National Capital Area developed a new twist. The campaign chairman, Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare Joseph A. Califano, decided to set a donation goal 12½ percent higher than that achieved in 1977. When word of that decision reached the subchairmen in the Pentagon, they balked. They and their fellow Pentagonites, both military and civilian, knew their October paychecks would reflect a 5.5 percent ceiling on cost-of-living adjustments imposed on federal payrolls by President Carter in the face of an actual cost growth of more than 10 percent. They reluctantly agreed to try for an increase of 10 percent but, as the time allocated to the fund drive ran out, the goal had not been achieved. The Pentagon had contributed more than in 1977 but not 10 percent more. The irony of the situation is heightened by a letter from the President contained in the campaign literature which says, in part, "...the decision to give and the amount of one's gift are, of course, personal voluntary decisions."

To the military and federal civil service people in the Washington area this is just another evidence of the insensitivity of the Administration to the impact its actions have on their welfare. Military pay was increased in 1969 to bring it into "comparability" with pay in the private sector of our economy but, beginning in 1973, a series of Presidentially-imposed pay ceilings has pushed military pay further and further behind the rising curve of inflation. By imposing his mandatory 5.5 percent limit on Federal pay adjustments which began in October the President told the people who work for him to take the balance of the 10-plus percent inflation in the cost of living "out of their hide."

Now the same people are being asked to squeeze more money out of their deflated paychecks, apparently because Secretary Califano thought it would be nice to exceed last year's charitable contributions. Did he first make sure that the agencies to be supported by the contributions had made their budgets conform to the President's anti-inflation guidelines? Did he give any thought to the notion that generosity toward one's fellow man must be tempered by the primary need to keep one's own family housed, clothed and fed?