



WHAT'S NEW?

from the
Benefits and Entitlements Service Team (BEST)

24 Nov 03

- **Flexible Spending Account (FSA) Open Season Extended to 15 Dec 03; Maximum Employee Contribution to Health Care FSA Increased.** OPM has announced the maximum amount employees may contribute to a health care FSA has increased from \$3,000 to \$4,000. The decision to raise the limit was prompted by a recent IRS announcement that over-the-counter medicines may be reimbursed under a health care FSA. In order to allow employees more time to consider how much to elect, the FSA Open Season has been extended by one week. It now ends on 15 Dec 03.
- **Over-the-Counter Medicines Now Reimbursable under Health Care FSA.** Based on a change in IRS rules, OPM announced that frequently used over-the-counter medications, such as decongestants and antihistamines, are now reimbursable under a health care FSA. Items that are “merely beneficial” to “general good health,” such as dietary supplements and vitamins, are not reimbursable.

18 Nov 03

- **TSP Participant Statements No Longer Automatically Mailed.** Beginning with statements for the quarter ending 31 Dec 03 (available Jan 04), the Thrift Savings Plan will no longer automatically mail Participant Statements to participants. Beginning Jan 04, Participant Statements will be available for review in the Account Access section of the TSP Web site (www.tsp.gov). However, you may request your next statement (and future statements) be mailed to you. Requests may be submitted via the TSP Web site, the ThriftLine, or by mail, but must be received by the TSP by 1 Dec 03. Information regarding this change has been included with your Participant Statement for the quarter ending 30 Sep 03, currently in the mail. Additional information is available on the [BEST homepage](#) under Thrift Savings Plan.

4 Nov 03

- **Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) Open Season 10 Nov - 8 Dec 03.** There are 17 new FEHB health plans for 2004, including two new consumer-driven plans. Nine health plans are dropping out. Links to the guides and plan brochures are located on our [Health Insurance](#) web page. Air Force-serviced civilian employees will use the EBIS web application or the BEST phone automated system to conduct open season enrollments or changes. Instructions on how to access EBIS and the phone system are available on the BEST homepage under [How to Access the BEST Automated Systems and Reach a Counselor](#).
- **During the FEHB Open Season, you may change your participation in Premium Conversion.** If you are participating in premium conversion, FEHB Open Season is the only time you may change from family to self-only coverage, or cancel your enrollment,

without having a qualifying life event. For more information, please visit our Health Insurance page and review the FEHB Premium Conversion Fact Sheet.

- **Flexible Spending Account (FSA) Open Season 10 Nov - 8 Dec 03.** SHPS will accept enrollment for plan year 2004 during the open season 10 Nov - 8 Dec 03. You will enroll via the FSAFEDS Web site at <http://www.fsafeds.com>, or by calling SHPS toll-free at 1-877-372-3337 (TTY 1-800-952-0450). General information regarding the FSA program is available on the BEST homepage, but you'll need to visit the FSAFEDS Web site or speak with an SHPS customer service representative to obtain more in-depth information.

3 Nov 03

- **Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) Participant Statements.** The Federal Thrift Board has advised that Participant Statements for the quarter ending 30 Sep 03 are being mailed in early Nov 03. The statement will contain all information about your account activity for Jun, Jul, Aug, and Sep 03. Be sure to review the beginning balance with the ending balance from the previous statement (May 03). If you identify an error in the amount of contributions or loan payments posted to your account, you have six months from the time the error was made to report it. If you do not receive your statement by the end of Nov 03, you should contact the TSP Service Office at (504) 255-8777 to request a duplicate statement.
- **Thrift Savings Plan Rates of Return Posted for Oct 03.** The following chart of G, F, C, S, and I Fund returns represent the change in their respective share prices for the month of Oct 03. The changes in share prices reflect net earnings after accrued TSP administrative expenses, trading costs and accrued investment managements fees have been deducted. Percentages in () are negative returns. The G, F, C, S, and I Fund returns for the last 12 months assume unchanging balances (time-weighting) from month to month, and assume that earnings are compounded on a monthly basis. For more information, including share costs, go to the TSP Homepage at www.tsp.gov and click on Rates of Returns.

	G Fund	F Fund	C Fund	S Fund	I Fund
October 2003	0.30%	(1.00%)	5.68%	7.65%	6.06%
<u>Last 12 Months</u> 11/1/2002 - 10/31/2003)	4.05%	4.89%	20.64%	38.27%	26.66%