

## Congressman seeks better planes for Fresno fighter wing

Rep. Devin Nunes is asking Air Force officials to put more muscle in the skies above the Pacific Coast and the southwestern United



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States.

Mr. Nunes and other members of Congress want the Air Force to supply the California Air National Guard's 144<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing located at the Fresno Yosemite International Airport with a squadron of F-15C's. Currently, the Guard flies F-16's.

"I think everyone agrees that the F-15C is better suited to accomplish the

Guard's Homeland Defense mission," said Mr. Nunes, whose district includes the fighter wing.

The 144<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing's Homeland Defense mission area extends from the California/Oregon border to the New Mexico/Texas border – encompassing much of the West Coast. This area includes some of the largest population centers in the nation and many of the important new technology companies in America.

The 144<sup>th</sup> FW mission is focused on coastal defense, which includes cruise missile intercept, air-to-air superiority and extended over-water patrol missions. Yet, for the past 10 years the 144<sup>th</sup> FW has been flying F-16s which have shorter flying ranges, only one engine (a crucial factor on over water flights), less powerful radar dishes, and carry less missiles than the more capa-

ble and well-suited F-15C.

Currently, the 144<sup>th</sup> FW is the only Homeland Defense unit – in fact the only air-to-air unit in the U.S. Air Force – not flying the F-15.

"Why would we ask the 144<sup>th</sup> FW to provide air superiority and Homeland Defense with an aircraft that is not designed for the mission?" Mr. Nunes said. "We think it is time that the 144<sup>th</sup> FW is given the right equipment for the assigned mission."

The F-15C would not only improve the 144<sup>th</sup> FW's ability to perform its mission, but also improve the pilots' chances of coming home alive from conflicts. For example, the longer-range radars on F-15Cs allow pilots to fire missiles at enemy planes without having to get as close as they would in F-16s.

The 144<sup>th</sup> FW has proven its excellence time and time

again. In 2000 alone, the unit for the eighth time received the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award, was named the California Air



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Force Association Unit of the Year and received the Governor's Outstanding Unit Citation.

The switch from F-16 to the F-15C is overwhelmingly supported by Lt. Governor Cruz Bustamante, The Adjutant General Paul Monroe, Fresno Mayor Alan Autry, Fresno City Council and the Fresno Board of Supervisors.

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**Left, Dena Cochran, vice president of the Kaweah Delta Hospital Foundation participates in a summit workshop. Above, Dr. Cristina Beato, principal deputy assistant secretary for U.S. Health and Human Services.**

ers on the House Committee on Ways and Means.

Some of the recommendations he is working on include:

Helping physicians in rural counties pay off their school loan by: 1) Giving a one-year suspension of educational loan re-payments once the physicians permanent practice to a rural county is verified; 2) Forgiving all interest dollars (accrued & future) associated with the loan; 3) Forgiving the loan on an inverted scale based on continued residence (i.e., 35% - 1st year; 25% - 2nd year, etc.)

Other recommendations included creating more flexibility in the Federal Emer-

gency Medical Treatment and Active Labor Act (EMTALA) to allow: 1) Health Clinic co-location with a hospital Emergency Department; 2) Patient pre-screening by a clinic-based medical triage; 3) The extension of health clinic business hours to 10:00 PM to coincide with the busiest times in emergency departments.

To deal with reimbursement rate disparities, some suggestions included providing a federal income tax credit for employers of agricultural workers who provide basic family health care insurance. Also, simply to increase the reimbursement rate.