

PROMISING FIRST YEAR FOR "OPERATION RESTORE TRUST" INITIATIVE

From U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services

■(WASHINGTON) Health and Human Services Secretary Donna E. Shalala marked the first-year anniversary of HHS' anti-fraud initiative, Operation Restore Trust, saying new approaches in the pilot program have already produced \$42.3 million in recoveries. This constitutes a return of \$10 in recoveries for every \$1 spent on the project.

"Operation Restore Trust has pioneered new partnerships within the federal government, new cooperation with states, and new ways of targeting and stopping fraud in the Medicare and Medicaid programs," Secretary Shalala said. "In its first year, Operation Restore Trust has proved its value, and the President wants to extend its reach to every state in the nation."

With first-year targeted demonstration project funds of \$4.09 million, Operation Restore Trust has produced \$42.3 million in restitutions, fines, settlements and recovery of overpayments. This includes \$24.5 million returning to the Medicare Trust Fund from criminal restitutions, fines and recoveries; \$14.1 million returning to the Trust Fund as a result of civil judgments, settlements and penalties; and \$3.7 million returned to the Treasury as a result of services inappropriately billed or medically unnecessary services rendered.

HHS Inspector General June Gibbs Brown said that "Operation Restore Trust is proving what it was meant to prove: that a new focus on fraud and abuse, and new cooperative approaches, can help us to better protect federal Medicare and Medicaid dollars."

The initiative was announced by President Clinton last May at the White House Conference on Aging. It is aimed specifically at fraud, waste and abuse in three high-growth areas of Medicare and Medicaid: home health agencies, nursing homes, and durable medical equipment suppliers.

Inspector General Brown said that out of 272 Medicare and Medicaid cases currently under investigation in the three targeted payment areas, 244 are new cases that were opened as a result of the Operation Restore Trust initiative. She said 64 of the cases are joint efforts with other law enforcement agencies.

Operation Restore Trust is focused on five states (New York, Florida, Illinois, Texas, and California) which account for

38.5 percent of Medicaid beneficiaries and 34 percent of Medicare beneficiaries.

Bruce Vladeck, administrator of the Health Care Financing Administration, said, "The object of Operation Restore Trust is not only to punish fraud and abuse, and to recover funds, but more important to identify areas of vulnerability and prevent fraud before it happens."

Vladeck said that a number of significant potential program changes have been identified as a result of Operation Restore Trust, which could result in substantial savings by preventing fraud, waste, and abuse before they occur. The potential changes are being developed as legislative, regulatory, and administrative actions.

The HHS Office of Inspector General, The Health Care Financing Administration and the Administration on Aging are the three agencies within HHS which are jointly carrying out the Operation Restore Trust initiative. The project has also involved an intergovernmental team comprised of federal and state personnel, including the Department of Justice and the United States Attorneys' offices across the country.

Inhofe, continued from page 4
Gil Gutknecht (R-Minn.).

The Inhofe bill would limit a new House or Senate member's ability to accrue pension benefits to a maximum of 12 years in each body. Current members would be limited to a maximum of 12 years of pension accrual in addition to what they already have. If passed, the bill would take effect in 1997 at the beginning of the new 105th Congress.

Inhofe pointed out that the current average Congressional pension is \$46,789, while some pensions for very long-serving members are in the \$100,000 range and more. Under this new bill, the pension benefit for a new member would be \$27,254.

"This bill will change the incentives in the current system," Inhofe said. "No longer will people in college contemplate making a lifelong career of going to Washington to direct other peoples' lives. They won't if they know up front that it is not going to be a ticket to \$100,000 pension. This reform will have the same effect as term limits. Though people could still serve longer if they chose, the financial incentive to do so will not be there."

FDA APPROVES FIRST HIV HOME TEST SYSTEM

From U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services

■(WASHINGTON) The Food and Drug Administration Tuesday approved the first HIV test system that includes collection of blood samples at home. Until now, all HIV tests, whether using blood or saliva samples, were done under the supervision of a health professional at medical facilities, clinics, physicians' offices or blood establishments. The new testing system is comprised of three integrated components: an over-the-counter home blood collection kit, HIV-1 antibody testing at a certified lab, and a test result center that provides test results, counseling and referral anonymously.

The test kit system is called the Confide HIV Testing Service, developed and marketed by Direct Access Diagnostics, a subsidiary of Johnson and Johnson, Bridgewater, NJ.

More than 60 percent of Americans at risk for contracting HIV have not been tested, according to estimates by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"Too many Americans do not know their HIV status. Knowledge is power, and power leads to prevention," said HHS Secretary Donna E. Shalala. "The availability of a home test should empower more people to learn their HIV status and protect themselves and their loved ones."

"We are confident that this new home system can provide accurate results while assuring patient anonymity and appropriate counseling," said Commissioner of Food and

See FDA, page 6

Nickles, continued from page 4

Since 1980, there have been 18 congressional convicts.

Reid is chairman of the Democratic Policy Committee and Nickles chairs the Republican Policy Committee. Nickles and Reid intend to use their Senate leadership positions to gain bipartisan support and move their bill through the Senate. Companion legislation to the Pension Forfeiture Act is pending in the House.

Under current law, pensions can be taken away upon conviction of certain felonies involving national security, such as treason or espionage while in office. The Reid-Nickles bill expands the list of felonies to include crimes relating to the abuse of public office.