





# Hearing focuses on how to combat wasteful government spending

WASHINGTON (AP) — Medicare paid mental health benefits to people with no history of mental illness. The Small Business Administration lost \$56 million settling loans because of mistakes by its own officials. The Interior Department lost nearly \$10 million on three Nevada land deals. These examples of government waste, turned up recently by federal watchdogs, are the topic for a congressional hearing today on how to make agencies more accountable for the money they spend and oversee. "We are going to shed the light of day on these problems

and ask why the agencies haven't been able to solve them," said Rep. Dan Burton, R-Ind., chairman of the House Government Reform and Oversight Committee. The committee will present highlights from investigative reports written by inspector generals, the internal watchdogs who police federal agencies for waste, fraud and abuse. Burton said the reports paint an alarming picture of systematic waste and fraud costing taxpayers billions each year. One example is Medicare, which lost an estimated \$20 billion from improper payments in

1997. A new audit released Tuesday by the Health and Human Services Department estimated that improper Medicare payments dropped to \$12.6 billion last year. More than half of the excessive charges were for services deemed medically unnecessary. The \$12.6 billion amounted to about 7 cents out of every dollar that was spent by Medicare in direct payments to health care providers, including doctors and hospitals. By comparison, in 1996 — the first year such estimates were made — improper Medicare payments were estimated at \$23.2 billion, or 14

cents of each dollar. "It shows a significant turnaround," said HHS Inspector General June Gibbs Brown, who attributed the improvement to stricter government supervision. She is scheduled to testify at the hearing. The latest audit show hospitals received most of the improper payments in 1998. Home health care companies showed the biggest improvement, with excessive payments dropping to \$800 million from \$2.5 billion in 1997. Burton called the audit "encouraging" but said the level of improper payments is

still unacceptable. "They're applauding this? This is still an outrageous amount of waste," Burton said. Other examples of waste to be examined by lawmakers: — SBA auditors found that the agency lost about \$56 million on loans liquidated in 1994 because of errors made in the liquidation process by lenders and SBA officials. — The Bureau of Land Management has continued to experience significant losses in a land exchange program because of improper dealings. A government crackdown on Medicare waste began in 1993

with new money and power granted by Congress. Since then, the proportion of the program's 860 million bills a year that are reviewed by auditors has risen from 5 percent to 14 percent, Brown said. Also, the Justice Department is working more closely with Medicare auditors to investigate suspicious claims and prosecute cases of suspected fraud. Some health care providers have complained that the anti-fraud tactics have been too harsh, threatening those who have made innocent mistakes and chilling caregivers' work with the elderly.

# Galleries cleared, Senate deliberates on Clinton

WASHINGTON (AP) — With the television cameras turned off and the public galleries emptied of spectators and reporters, senators are rising to speak, one by one, in a what a participant describes as dignified debate over whether President Clinton should remain in office. The leadoff speaker during Tuesday's closed impeachment deliberations — the first for a president in 131 years — immediately disclosed his intentions. "The president should be removed from office for obstruction of justice," said Sen. Slade Gorton, R-Wash., who released his remarks following the four-hour session. On the other impeachment article, which charges Clinton committed perjury before a federal grand jury, Gorton said, "Although the president lied, this specific case of perjury does not rise to a level requiring removal."

Senators were resuming their closed deliberations today, and likely would continue Thursday, arguing the evidence as to the outcome was still in doubt in a trial now in its fifth week. In fact, senators from both parties acknowledge Clinton is assured of acquittal because the two-thirds margin for conviction cannot be attained. For days, senators have been forecasting a stronger conviction vote on the obstruction-of-justice article than on a perjury count that might not attain even a majority. Once the closed deliberations end, the Senate will convene again in open session and formally vote on the two articles of impeachment, likely Thursday or Friday. If Clinton is acquitted as expected, several Republicans expressed a willingness

Tuesday to end the impeachment ordeal without further action — leaving it to historians, rather than a Senate censure, to judge his efforts to cover up an extramarital affair with former White House intern Monica Lewinsky. The censure idea is "a rose that is beginning to wilt," said Sen. Larry Craig, R-Idaho, a member of the Senate Republican leadership. Some Democrats, he said, want a censure because they're "seeking cover" for their expected acquittal votes. However, a censure resolution — either immediately following the trial or later — remained a possibility because Republican opposition was being countered by support from most Democrats and a handful of GOP senators. Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison, R-Texas, said the proposal "is

waning as an option — alive but on life support." But Sen. John Chafee, R-R.I., cautioned that "No one should be compiling a dirge over censure; if anything, I believe we are picking up support on the both sides of the aisle." But to have a such a measure considered in the 100-member Senate, supporters would need 60 votes to hurdle an expected stalling action by Sen. Phil Gramm, R-Texas, the leading opponent of a censure. He believes a censure violates the Constitution. Craig said the closed-door speeches "are not all ... dynamic," and about four or five senators asked questions of their colleagues such as "Why do you believe that?" or "Where did you find that?" in the trial record? "Many aspects of the case are being discussed," he said.

# Texas winter among the warmest on record

LUBBOCK (AP) — Flowers are blooming, jogging paths are packed with sweaty New Year's resolution-inspired runners and ice cream shops are selling cones by the dozen. Not your typical February, even for Texas. Temperatures this month have been nearly 15 degrees above average in some parts. What happened to winter? Forecasters say it could be back with a vengeance before the week ends. "By Thursday we expect an upper-level pressure system to bring in a cold front that will drop temperatures below normal," said Lubbock National Weather Service forecaster Tim Tinsley. "This won't last." Texans can expect Thursday to be one of those days when you leave home without a coat and regret it all day. "The temperatures will drop very rapidly, changing significantly in a matter of hours," Tinsley said. Forecasters say the unseasonably warm weather, which began in late January, resulted from a low-pressure system that entered the state from the northwest. The system has shielded Texas from the cold mountain air that normally would keep the state icy until early March. But the coming upper-level system will dominate the lower-pressure system, causing temperatures to plunge. In Lubbock, highs reached 77

degrees Tuesday — 16 degrees higher than the average for the date. Austin and San Antonio were also in the mid-70s, more than 10 degrees above average. Temperatures were the most abnormal in Dallas, where highs reached 76, almost 20 degrees higher than expected. Not only has the mercury been soaring, but it hasn't been dropping back down at night. Meanwhile, businesses that are usually dormant during the winter have noticed an upswing in sales attributed to the pleasant weather. "People are out more and business has generally been better than it normally is this year," said Ray Williams, who owns Fast Bikes, a bicycle store in San Antonio. Jeanna Smith, the manager of a Lubbock Dairy Queen, said she also has noticed increased sales. "Yep. We're selling cones like it's spring," Ms. Smith said. "No doubt about it, the weather isn't keeping people away." In Houston, where highs reached 78 Tuesday, NWS forecaster Don Oetinger was predicting that the coming cold front will crash Houston's early spring by the end of the week. "We're looking for the cold front to arrive late Thursday, probably Friday," Oetinger said. "Temperatures could fall into the 50s."

# USDA almost out of loan money, Glickman says

WASHINGTON (AP) — A rush of farmers borrowing money to handle debt after a year of low prices has nearly depleted federal loan money, Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman said. The agency is preparing numbers to formally request additional money from Congress. Glickman told a Senate committee Tuesday. "Our funding will be exhausted in the next few weeks," Glickman said. "Demand is out-running our funding." He said the agency has not

decided how much money to request but said it may be as much as \$100 million for loans, plus additional money to assist Puerto Rico, which was hit hard by Hurricane Georges last year. Agency officials said they hoped to prepare paperwork to submit to the White House in the next few days. Farmers have been forced to seek more loans to restructure debt and jump-start their operations after a year in which prices in some sectors dipped to record lows. Hog farmers, for instance, saw

prices drop as low as \$8 a hundredweight in December. Grain farmers also had a bad price year. "There are lines. There is a waiting period," Glickman said of the Farm Service Agency offices in various states that administer USDA loans. Last week, a coalition of farm groups wrote Congress warning them of the impending crisis. "The continuation of low prices for virtually all commodities and livestock — as well as natural disaster which occurred in 1998 — has dramati-

cally increased the demand for funding through guaranteed loan programs," the groups wrote. Demand has increased 26 percent for the guaranteed operating loan, 160 percent for the interest assistance program and 92 percent for the guaranteed farm ownership program, the groups said. "We want to make sure that every farmer and rancher that is having financial difficulties has access to the options that the guaranteed loan programs offer," the letter said.

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WEDNESDAY

FEB. 10

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THIS DATE IN HISTORY

324 days left in the year. Today's Highlight in History: Fifty years ago, on Feb. 10, 1949, Arthur Miller's play "Death of a Salesman" opened at Broadway's Morosco Theater. On this date: In 1763, France ceded Canada

THE Daily Crossword Edited by Wayne Robert Williams

Crossword puzzle grid with clues. Across: 1. "M\*A\*S\*H" star, 5. Port of Iraq, 10. Ireland, 14. Marsh grass, 15. Messages on the computer, 16. Unclothed, 17. Currier and Ives, 18. Hand on TV, 21. Friends, 22. Buoyed up?, 23. The ... of the Netherlands, 25. Lulu, 26. Prentiss and Abdul, 28. Regional languages, 32. Musical Horne, 33. Singer Steve, 35. Gilbert of "Roseanne", 36. Creative skill, 37. Payable, 38. Running game, 39. Stadium level, 41. Yogi of baseball, 43. Irish Rose's love, 44. Peacefully, 46. Ski-slope mounds, 48. 1996 election loser, 49. Stalk of asparagus, 50. 1998 winner of two golf majors, 53. Last of a gang?, 54. Wedge-shaped device, 57. Animal warden, 59. French pronoun, 60. Part of Q.E.D., 61. Banishment, 62. Banister, 63. Cincinnati nine, 64. FDR's money?, 65. Square measure, 66. Tardy, 67. Second-story man, 68. Bring up the rear, 69. Man of wisdom, 70. Astaire's sister, 71. Edits, 72. Author, 73. Turkish title, 74. "You've Got Mail" director, 75. Ephron, 76. The ... ramps, 77. Engraved stone, 78. Neisse line, 79. Additional, 80. Zounds!, 81. Leveling device, 82. Nastase of tennis, 83. Actor Lugosi, 84. 111, 85. Period.

Tuesday's Puzzle Solved grid with words filled in. Words include: MALT, STOVE, BARD, ALAI, TOWER, ERIE, JOHNWAYNEWTON, AUREOLE, NASTY, RED, MUIR, WALLER, GINGERED, IDEE, SEDUM, AXE, DIANAROSSMARTIN, EER, ROOST, BELT, RUNSINTO, GLIDES, NOAH, DIE, AEGIS, BEANBAGS, STEVEALLENDRURY, ARNE, EVERT, IRAN, PEAL, SIDES, MASC.

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to England under the Treaty of Paris, which ended the French and Indian War. In 1840, Britain's Queen Victoria married Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. In 1846, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, the Mormons, began an exodus from Illinois to the west. In 1933, the first singing telegram was introduced by the Postal Telegram Co. in New York. In 1942, the former French liner Normandie capsized in New York Harbor a day after it caught fire while being refitted for the U.S. Navy. In 1942, RCA Victor presented Glenn Miller and his Orchestra with a "gold record" for their recording of "Chattanooga Choo Choo," which had sold more than 1 million copies. In 1962, the Soviet Union exchanged captured American U-2 pilot Francis Gary Powers for Rudolph Ivanovich Abel, a Soviet spy held by the United States. In 1967, the 25th Amendment to the Constitution, dealing with presidential disability and succession, went into effect. In 1968, Peggy Fleming of the United States won the gold medal in ladies' figure skating at the Winter Olympic Games in Grenoble, France. In 1981, eight people were killed and 198 injured, when fire broke out at the Las Vegas Hilton hotel-casino. Ten years ago: Ron Brown was elected chairman of the Democratic National Committee, becoming the first black to head a major U.S. political party. Five years ago: The Senate approved \$8.6 billion in relief for victims of the Los Angeles earthquake. The House approved the measure the next day, and President Clinton signed it the day after that. One year ago: Dr. David Satcher was confirmed by the Senate to be surgeon general. Voters in Maine become the first to repeal a state gay rights law. Monica Lewinsky's mother, Marcia Lewis, testified before the grand jury investigating her daughter's alleged affair with President Clinton. Speedskater Hiroyasu Shimizu won Japan's first gold medal at the Nagano Olympics, in the 500-meter event. Today's Birthdays: Opera singer Leontyne Price is 72. Movie composer Jerry Goldsmith is 70. Actor Robert Wagner is 69. Mississippi Gov. Kirk Fordice is 65. Singer Roberta Flack is 60. Singer Jimmy Merchant is 59. Olympic gold-medal swimmer Mark Spitz is 49. Actress Kathleen Beller is 44.

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