



TAKING OUT THE TRASH

February 23, 2004

Scooters, Lies, and Videotape

The Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) is currently undertaking a major crackdown on phony claims for power wheel chairs and has recovered \$52.5 million thus far. One 89 year-old from Ocala, Florida said that she and her husband were approached by a salesperson who pressured them into an unnecessary order. Medicare was then billed \$15,500 for two scooters, a hospital bed, and a pressure mattress – none of which was needed. Another senior citizen testified in court that a claim had been submitted without her approval. She then demonstrated her lack of need for the wheelchair by walking before the jurors. (“Medicare Stung by Wheelchair Scam,” Associated Press, November 12, 2003)

Left Hand Meet the Right Hand

According to its own Inspector General, the Social Security Administration improperly assigned one out of every 13 Social Security numbers (SSNs) to foreign-born individuals in 2000. 96,274 foreigners found with SSA-administered SSNs did not meet INS standards. The “INS either had no record of these individuals or INS records did not agree with the evidentiary documents presented to SSA. In either case...SSA should not have assigned these [numbers].” (Social Security Administration, Office of Inspector General, A-08-02-12506, August 2002)

Take it to the Wood Chipper

An audit of the Alleghany County Housing Authority revealed a number of highly questionable spending items paid for with federal money. More than a half-million dollars in drug elimination grants were used inappropriately on tickets to the Harlem Globetrotters, the circus, and other entertainment venues. One beneficiary credited his support to the fact that, “It helps us not to do drugs because we’re occupied.” In addition, the audit pointed to a \$20,000 wood chipper purchased with the same grant monies. The housing authority claimed that it was necessary to prevent assault in that it cleared out wooded areas where sexual predators may be hidden. (“Audit Puts Housing Authority in Hot Seat,” KDKA, February 11, 2004)

Bo Must Know Milk

The NIH’s Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) recently launched a new “Milk Matters” website for children, featuring Bo Vine the “spokescow.” The website is the latest installment of a long-term Milk Matters campaign, begun in 1997 under President Clinton, to get “children to have fun while they learn about the importance of calcium.” The website also offers free coloring books, stickers, and posters in both English and Spanish at taxpayer expense. [“NIH’s Institute of Child Health and Development Launches New Milk Matters’ Web Games,” Republican Study Committee, February 2004]

Tough Month for J-Lo and the Kid

The General Accounting Office uncovered roughly \$433,000 in inappropriate expenses that the United Services Organization (USO) charged to the Pentagon over a two-year period. The charges were for alcohol, limousines, and first-class airplane tickets in conjunction with concerts performed by Jennifer Lopez, Kid Rock, Ja Rule, and others. In one instance, the Pentagon paid MTV for \$343,910 for “production expenses” at the Lopez concert. Federal guidelines require that any luxury expenses be paid out of private donations. (“USO Cited for Improper Expenses for J-Lo, Other Concerts,” Fox News, January 22, 2004)