GSA fraud estimate increases

United Press International

WASHINGTON — The total amount of money stolen from the scandal-marred General Services Administration is now estimated at more than $100 million a year.

Earlier estimates by GSA investigators and auditors had placed the amount stolen from the $5 billion-a-year building and supply agency at $66 million a year.

But GSA chief auditor Howard Davia told a House Government Activities Subcommittee Tuesday revised estimates based on actual fraud cases and agency audits revealed that annual fraud is potentially about $100 million.

GSA chief Jay Solomon told the panel about 50 GSA employees have been disciplined as a result of the growing investigation into mismanagement and fraud at the agency, and dozens more have been transferred to other jobs.

However, Solomon and his chief investigator, Vincent Alto, both agreed the recent revelations represent "only the beginning" of a chain of corruption dating back more than two decades.

Solomon also said Atlanta attorney Charles Kirbo, President Carter's close friend and adviser, has had "a very small role" in the GSA investigation. Solomon said he has had "little contact" with Kirbo.

Carter named Kirbo last month to monitor the investigation, but Solomon said his actual role had been exaggerated.

In addition to the 50 disciplined employees, 12 GSA workers indicted by a federal grand jury last week for fraud have been dismissed from their jobs.

In a related matter, two senators sent Solomon a letter asking for the names of any senior GSA officials — past or present — under investigation for wrongdoing.

Sens. William Roth, R-Del., and John Heinz, R-Pa., expressed concern "the investigation is focusing more on the actual perpetrators of fraud and abuse than on the officials who, knowingly or unknowingly, allowed it to continue."

Texas attracting drug smugglers

United Press International

CORPUS CHRISTI — Stepped-up law enforcement efforts along the East Coast have caused international drug dealers to eye the Texas Gulf Coast as a more favorable route for drug smuggling, the head of the Drug Enforcement Administration said Tuesday.

DEA Administrator Peter Bensinger, speaking at a joint news conference with State Attorney General John Hill, said cooperation between federal, state and local law enforcement agencies in Texas would be necessary to thwart smugglers using air and marine routes from South America and Mexico.

The news conference opened a three-day closed-door anti-smuggling conference which has attracted more than 70 Texas law enforcement officials and numerous federal narcotics agents.

Citing statistics indicating smugglers are encountering stiff resistance along the East Coast, particularly in Florida, Bensinger said, "We are seeing some of the traffic shift to the Texas Gulf Coast."

He said recent seizures included two million pounds of marijuana, 1,000 pounds of cocaine, 82 mother ships and 462 defendants.

The DEA chief said the highly organized and well-financed traffickers could succeed in penetrating Texas unless authorities develop "an element of unity and information exchange that is desperately needed."

"At the close of this conference we will develop a task force for Texas to control air and marine traffic in our state."

Asked about reports a federal grand jury in Corpus Christi was investigating possible links between drug trafficking and certain South Texas public officials, Hill said: "It's not a subject I should get into at a press conference, but frankly we have some deep undercover efforts underway right now."

Bensinger said most marijuana reaching the United States originates in Colombia, because eradication efforts in Mexico, along with increased cooperation between U.S. and Mexican officers, have slowed drug exports from that country. He said heroin flow from Mexico had been drastically reduced, based on decreasing overdose statistics in the United States.

Ford willing to accept next GOP nomination

United Press International

NEW ORLEANS — Former President Gerald Ford says he is ready to return to the White House if the Republicans want to send him.

During a question-and-answer session after a speech to convention delegates, Ford said Tuesday he was ready for a Republican presidential draft.

"They said I'm healthy, I'm going to be active, I've got time to consider a number of options," Ford said. "I'll simply say I won't duck any responsibility in 1980."

The former president used his speech to the International Oil Industry Tire, Battery and Auto Accessory Association convention to warn the Carter Administration away from mandatory wage and price controls to curb inflation.

Ford said he expects President Carter to impose a form of wage and price controls to curb inflation, a policy that Ford said will not work.

"I'm getting more and more apprehensive over the ultimate prospects of the administration doing something about inflation by starting us down the road to mandatory wage and price controls," the former chief executive said.

"I've lived through price controls at the time of the Korean War and in 1971 when my predecessor (Richard Nixon) imposed wage and price controls.

"It is my experience that wage and price controls may be good politics, but they're lousy economics."

Ford labeled government spending as "the villian" in the inflation problem.

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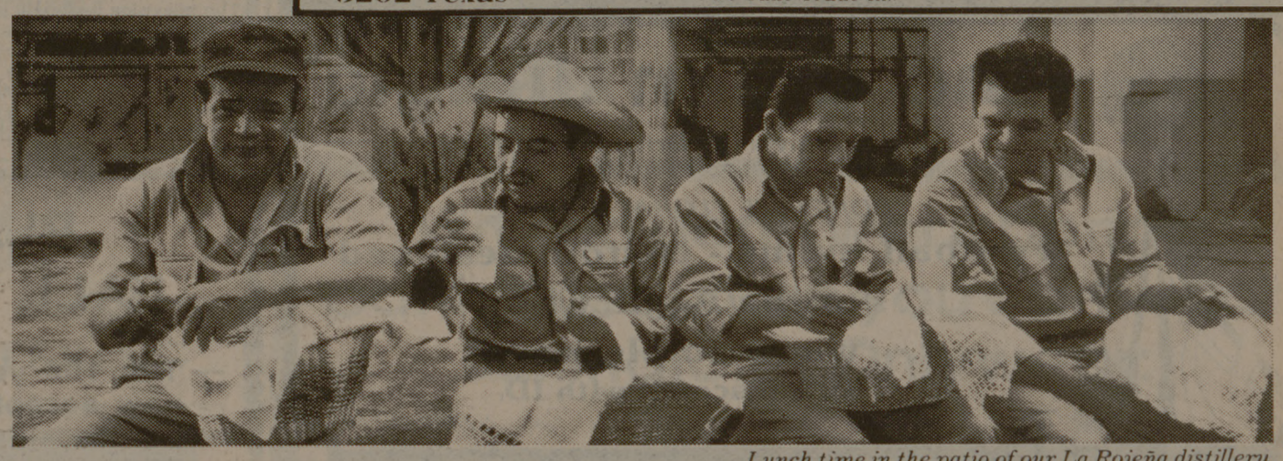

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