

## **Improving Financial Accountability**

A few weeks ago, I was confirmed by the United States Senate to the position of Controller for the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). Having served most recently at the U.S. Department of Transportation as Assistant Secretary for Budget and Programs and Chief Financial Officer, I am pleased to now serve the President and the Administration in this new capacity at OMB.

As Controller, I am the statutory head of the Office of Federal Financial Management (OFFM), which is responsible for the financial management policies of the Federal Government. By carrying out the duties of the Chief Financial Officers Act of 1990, we are working to develop and implement government-wide financial management policies and practices for Federal agencies. And it is sound financial management that ensures taxpayer dollars are not being wasted, that the government's financial books are in order, and that government decision-makers have access to accurate financial information.

I now also lead the *Improved Financial Performance Initiative* of the President's Management Agenda (PMA). This initiative focuses on improving the quality and timeliness of Federal financial information. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2004, 18 major departments and agencies received unqualified audit opinions on their financial statements. In addition, 22 agencies accelerated the completion of their financial statements, making vital financial information available to agency leaders within just 45 days of the close of the fiscal year. With the end of FY 2005 approaching, I look forward to building off the success of last year as Federal agencies complete their audited financial statements.

Over the past quarter, several agencies have exhibited success in improving their financial reporting processes. For example, notable progress took place at the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Treasury, as shown by both being upgraded to yellow status in progress. We are also working closely with the agencies to ensure that all have a comprehensive financial management remediation plan in place, and are taking the necessary steps to position themselves for unqualified audit results in Fiscal Year 2005.

Additionally, as Controller, I oversee implementation of the *Eliminating Improper Payments Initiative* of the PMA. Under this initiative, OMB is specifically tracking – through the quarterly Scorecard process – the status and progress of the 15 major agencies with programs and activities with the highest risk of improper payment. By holding agencies accountable for their efforts to identify and eliminate improper payments under this initiative, we are working to ensure citizens get their money's worth. There is simply no more important undertaking than the efficient stewardship of taxpayer dollars.

In my new role at OMB, I look forward to continuing the important efforts to improve financial management and reporting in our government.

Linda M. Combs  
Controller