

Cracking down on identity theft

Throughout your busy day you may write a check for a bill, charge tickets to a concert, buy a plane ticket online, rent a car, or apply for a credit card. These all seem like simple transactions that do not require a second thought. But, without keeping careful watch of everyday transactions like these and many others you may be putting yourself at risk for identity theft.

Identity theft is a serious problem, not to mention a serious crime. Since the 1990s, there has been a sharp increase in the number of crooks who steal people's personal information and assume their identity to charge up huge credit card bills, telephone bills, buy cars, and apply for loans.

"If your identity has been stolen, it often takes years and thousands of dollars to repair the damage done to your good name and good credit," Rep. Devin Nunes said. "Victims of identity theft may lose job opportunities, be refused loans for education, housing, cars and even be arrested for crimes they didn't commit. Having your identity stolen is more than a headache, it is a mess."

Identity theft is the number one consumer complaint. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) reported 162,000 identity theft complaints in 2002 alone, with estimated losses of \$2.1 billion. In fact, identity theft often aids terrorist crimes. Foreign terrorists can move more freely in the

U.S. with illicit ID cards, credit cards, and other documentation.

The Identity Theft Penalty Enhancement Act (H.R. 1731) is aimed at helping facilitate the prosecution of criminals who steal identities in order to commit felonies. It will create a new and separate crime of "aggravated identity theft" for any person who uses the identity of another person to commit certain felonies, bringing with it an additional mandatory sentence of two years for most felonies and five years for terror-related felonies.

"This bill gives our law enforcement officials the tools they need to prosecute these types of criminals. People who would steal someone else's identity and trash their credit do not deserve a soft landing. They deserve to be behind bars," Nunes said.

Protecting yourself from identity theft

Guarding against and recovering from identity theft is not easy. But there are things you and your family can do to protect yourselves. If you have been a victim of identity theft, call the FTC's hotline toll-free at (877) 438-4338. To learn more about identity theft and all the ways you can protect yourself, visit the FTC's website at www.consumer.gov/idtheft.

The following is a brief list of some simple steps to help protect your personal information:

- Order a copy of your credit report from each of the three major credit-reporting agencies. By checking your record on a regular basis, you can catch mistakes and fraud before it is too late.
- Place passwords on your credit card, bank, and phone accounts. Avoid using information like your mother's maiden name, your birth date, the last four digits of your Social Security number, or your phone number.
- Do not give out your personal information over the phone, through the mail, or on the Internet unless you have initiated the contact or are sure you know with whom you are dealing. Identity thieves often pose as bank representatives or even government agencies to get you to reveal your information.
- Secure your personal information in your home and on your computer, especially if you have roommates, employ outside help, or are having service work done in your home.
- Deposit outgoing mail in post office collection boxes or at the post office, rather than leaving it in an unsecured mailbox.



Reps. Doug Ose (center) and Devin Nunes (right) address the media during a press conference after a Congressional hearing on drug production on public lands.

Curtailing drug production on public lands

Rep. Devin Nunes hosted a Congressional hearing on the problem of drug production on public lands.

The hearing in October featured two subcommittee chairmen of the House Committee on Government Reform: Rep. Doug Ose, chairman of the Subcommittee on Energy Policy, Natural Resources and Regulatory Affairs; and Rep. Mark Souder, chairman of the Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources.

The hearing focused on problems with pot, opium, and methamphetamine on public lands.

Along these lines Chairman Doug Ose has introduced legislation this year called the CLEAN UP Meth Act (CLEAN UP stands for Clean, Learn, Educate, Abolish, Neutralize, and Undermine Production). The bill is a comprehensive approach to combating meth.

Both Chairman Souder and Rep. Nunes have co-sponsored the bill, as have dozens of other lawmakers.

As part of the hearing, the congressman's staff toured a newly discovered pot plantation in the forest with an elaborate irrigation system.

More than 10,000 served

Being a congressman means serving the residents of your area in big and small ways.

The big ways often involve legislation, which must successfully make its way through Congress to the President's desk. Making law usually helps many people at a time; and, more often than not, it's tougher to get done.

But the role of a congressman is more than just helping vast numbers of people in a single stroke, it's about caring for the individual and lending a hand on a personal basis.

Since January, tours of the U.S. Capitol, the White House, Library of Congress, Supreme Court, Kennedy Center, National Archives, Bureau of Engraving and Printing, and Mt. Vernon have been or-

ganized for 1,249 constituents, in addition to responses written to more than 8,500 constituents, and casework files opened for more than 500 constituents.

"One of the most important duties is helping 21st District residents when they have problems with a federal government agency," Mr. Nunes said.

"If you need help determining if your problem involves a local, state or federal agency, or if you need help to get your Social Security check, have questions about your military records, Medicare coverage, VA claims, a problem with the IRS, or any other federal agency, please do not hesitate to contact my district office.



Rep. Devin Nunes talks with Gov.-elect Arnold Schwarzenegger about the budget crisis in California.