

Feds assure Molinari of hospital \$\$

By TERENCE J. KIVLAN
Advance Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — Congressman Guy V. Molinari says he has been assured by Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Richard Schweiker that the federal government will sustain the U.S. Public Health Service Hospital, Clifton, financially while it is being converted to a local facility.

Molinari said that during an "extended" telephone conversation with the secretary yesterday, he asked Schweiker if his department would continue to provide current levels of funding to the Staten Island hospital during the transition.

According to Molinari, the secretary replied that he "didn't see any real problem there" and that he would discuss the matter with Office of Management and Budget Director David Stockman.

Although the administration's budget legislation for 1982 authorizes funding for the three Public Health Service (PHS) facilities slated for local takeovers until at least March 31, other Department of Health and Human Services officials have warned that a financial crisis could loom in the coming months because of an appropriations shortfall. The officials have said they may have to seek supplemental appropriations to cover the costs of the facilities.

Molinari, however, said he was satisfied with Schweiker's personal assurance. "This is information I received from a member of the Cabinet, and I have to assume its accurate," the congressman said. He added, "He (Schweiker) is a man of his word and he did not equivocate."

The congressman said he also

sought Schweiker's support for having the Clifton hospital designated a Uniformed Military Personnel facility. This means the hospital could treat active and retired military personnel and then get federal reimbursements for the service.

"It would mean a lot of dollars for the hospital," the congressman explained.

Department of Defense officials have so far resisted the idea of including the Island medical center in the program, according to Molinari. But he said

Schweiker promised to explore the possibility of having HHS unilaterally grant the designation.

The local conversion effort was launched on the Island this week when HHS selected St. Vincent's Medical Center as the entity that will attempt to assume control of and run the PHS hospital when the federal government abandons it sometime next year.

Molinari and other local officials believe the success of the project will hinge on whether the facility can be kept open while the takeover plan is being developed and implemented. "If it has to close for one day, it could be

all over," the congressman said.

St. Vincent's officials are working against an Aug. 15 deadline to produce the conversion proposal. It would then have to be approved by HHS. The other private hospitals in the borough have pledged to help in the project.

Sources say the proposal is likely to call for scaling down the size of the hospital from 400 beds to perhaps 250 beds. The difference represents the number of merchant seamen that the PHS facility is required to serve under current law. Their entitlement program is being eliminated by Congress.