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Office of New York State Attorney General Eliot Spitzer

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 Department of Law
 120 Broadway
 New York, NY 10271

Department
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 12224

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For
 Immediate
 Release
 Jan. 6, 2000

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LEGAL EXPERTS PRAISE SPITZER'S FIRST YEAR

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Attorney General Commended for Staff Selections and Key Initiatives

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Independent legal experts have praised Attorney General Eliot Spitzer's first year in office, noting that he has made quality staff appointments and advanced a series of well-conceived public policy initiatives and legal actions.

Spitzer acknowledged the comments, saying: "If there was one thing we were focused on in our first year, it was to try to return the office to the prestige and national presence it enjoyed in the past. Through our hiring practices and early initiatives -- including attempts to reform the gun industry, clean up the environment, and focus on civil rights -- we have made real progress toward that goal."

Among Spitzer's first-year initiatives:

- The Attorney General has become a leader in national negotiations with the gun industry to make safer products and change the way guns are marketed. Recently, the Clinton administration, through the Department of Housing and Urban Development, joined the effort;
- New York became the first state to sue Midwestern power plants over the issue of acid rain. Following New York's action, the Environmental Protection Agency ordered hundreds of out-of-state plants to reduce their nitrogen oxide emissions;
- Following the death of a woman pushed in front of a subway train by a severely mentally ill man, Spitzer proposed the legislation which became "Kendra's Law." The law enables family members, care givers, and roommates to petition the courts to ensure that the mentally ill take their prescribed

- medication;
- Spitzer's Civil Rights Bureau conducted an eight month investigation into the "stop and frisk" practices of the New York City Police Department. The study found that blacks and Hispanics were being stopped disproportionately when compared to whites;
 - The Attorney General's office was the first in the nation to investigate the problems of online stock trading. The probe has resulted in a \$500,000 public education campaign, to be paid for by the industry, and recommendations for equipment upgrades and increased disclosure by firms concerning problems and outages;
 - Spitzer's Medicaid Fraud Control Unit brought the largest civil case in the unit's history. The A.G. reached a \$45 million settlement with Staten Island University Hospital for over billings to the Medicaid system.

In response to these and other initiatives, legal experts offered the following comments:

Michael Cardozo, the former President of the New York City Bar Association, said: "The Attorney General has had a very impressive first year in office. Mr. Spitzer has already proven himself to be an effective advocate in tackling issues important to the public, be it the environment, public safety or consumer protection. He is to be commended for hiring outstanding legal talent and for making merit - not political affiliation -- the test for hiring and retaining personnel. His moderate, non-partisan approach is in the best tradition of New York's Attorneys General."

David Leebron, Dean of Columbia Law School, said: "Eliot Spitzer, in his first year, has been extremely energetic and creative in using tort law to protect the interests of the State and its citizens."

* Patricia Salkin, Associate Dean and the Director of the Government Law Center of Albany Law School: "Over the last year, the Attorney General has demonstrated a deep commitment to the area of government ethics. His promised Public Integrity Unit is now staffed and working, providing resources and offering assistance to local authorities, helping to earn the public trust in government. His willingness to get involved in key ethics issues in the State this past year, such as the OTB scandal and the enforcement of the lobbying law and related laws was a refreshing display of leadership."

Spitzer's top 30 staff members include three former U.S. Supreme Court clerks, the former Executive Director of the N.Y. State Ethics Commission, a pioneer in the development of the Peace Corps, and a former Senior Attorney for the National Resources Defense Council. Of his cabinet-level hires, all have degrees from the nation's top law schools.

Spitzer said he would continue and an aggressive, but moderate approach in the new year: "When taking my oath a year ago, I said that this office should not be a Republican office or a Democratic office, but the people's office, the people's law firm. Although I am pleased by our beginning, I know that it is only a beginning and that much work lies ahead. The public demands it of us, and we demand it of ourselves.

"At the start of our second year in office, I want to renew my pledge to the people of New York -- our clients -- that our mission remains to vigorously enforce the laws our state, protect consumers and safeguard the environment."
