



Written by [Brian Koenig](#) on April 12, 2012

GSA Officials Received Bonuses for Lavish Las Vegas Conference

A report issued earlier this month by GSA Inspector General (IG) Brian Miller (left) documented the [towering costs](#) for the \$823,000 training conference, which included \$130,000 in travel expenses, \$146,000 on catered food and drinks, and a \$2,000 party in a top official's hotel suite. "As the agency Congress has entrusted with developing the rules followed by other federal agencies for conferences, GSA has a special responsibility to set an example, and that did not occur here," Miller [wrote](#) in the report. The agency "followed neither federal procurement laws nor its own policy on conference spending."



The latest controversy surrounding the scandal is a detail in Miller's report showing that 50 employees received cash awards of \$500 and \$1,000 for preparing the conference. "It would... appear that a number of GSA bureaucrats who helped arrange the Las Vegas junket were handed cash bonuses for their work in wasting the better part of a million dollars," Rep. John Mica, (R-Fla.) [asserted](#) Tuesday.

Also revealed Tuesday, taxpayers paid for one top official to stay an extra night in Las Vegas, even though the convention had already ended. Calling the latest disclosure the "icing on the cake," Rep. Mica affirmed that this particular official paid only \$93 for the extra night in the Vegas suite, which has a price tag of more than \$1,000 per night. Evidently, the rest of the tab was "charged to the taxpayer," Mica said in a statement.

Furthermore, the Associated Press reported Wednesday that the GSA forked out as much as \$330,000 to transfer an employee from Denver to Hawaii. The new revelation became public after the AP obtained a copy of a transcript that documented an interview between an Inspector General's investigator and an agency employee who managed relocations.

"I mean that blew me away when I saw how much it costs to relocate somebody. It's crazy. It's astronomical," the employee said during the interview.

The GSA employee also rattled off a catalog of perks that were included in relocations: House hunting, laundry, groceries, shipping vehicles and household goods, paying closing costs on new homes, buying the employee's former home if it can't be sold, and providing temporary housing that sometimes was extended to 90 days. "I mean it's outrageous," the employee affirmed.

Q. In the past two years how much do you think you've seen spent.

A. Oh, millions.

Q. And how many employees are we talking about.

A. I'd say, right now, probably about 15 files on my desk.



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The employee went on to acknowledge that the individual who was transferred from Denver to Hawaii resigned from their GSA position after only a year. She said management "had told me not to tell anyone how much those things cost because people would just be really surprised at what we spent."

In a separate interview, the IG was informed that GSA officials flew to Hawaii and went on other taxpayer-funded junkets, sometimes for more than a week, just to be briefed on federal building ribbon-cutting ceremonies. Several GSA officials, for instance, flew to Hawaii in 2011 for a weeklong trip to attend an hour-long ribbon cutting on new real estate leased by the government.

Other transcripts of federal interviews show that a GSA whistleblower had [questioned](#) the GSA board of directors on the "extravagant" events, but there was fear of "being squashed like a bug":

You know ... she's been trying to bring this stuff up at the board of directors meeting and she'd promptly get squashed like a bug when she brought up any kind of things concerning the conferences and the extravagances and the suites and the, you know, the hotel suites, because typically at any conference, I mean, the WRC (Las Vegas conference) was not a one-time thing where certain people got these very extravagant accommodations.

Several GSA employees have either been fired or placed on administrative leave over Miller's report on the 2010 event. Music videos spotlighted at the conference have gone viral, showing agency employees guffawing about the GSA's exorbitant spending, while mocking internal investigations. Fox News reported:

The House Oversight and Government Reform Committee has been releasing the videos as it launches an investigation into GSA spending following the inspector general's report. The committee announced late Monday that it has scheduled a hearing for April 16, where Martha Johnson — until recently the head of GSA — has been invited to testify, along with the inspector general.

In response to the IG's damning report, the GSA canceled an upcoming conference scheduled for April 25 at a hotel, ironically, in Las Vegas. Called the "GreenUP 2012 Training Conference and Vendor Showcase," the event was intended to gather contractors and GSA workers for a training on eco-friendly products and services, such as plug-in electric cars and "green" paper products.

A GSA spokesman "says the event has been axed," the *Washington Post* [reported](#), and acting Administrator Dan Tangherlini disclosed in a letter to agency employees that he would review all upcoming conferences "that involve travel or substantial expenditures of public funds."

"GSA's culture of lavish spending clearly goes well beyond a single convention," asserted Rep. Darrell Issa (R-Calif.), chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, a congressional committee now probing GSA spending. "It's troubling to see the agency tasked with setting the standard for accountability and cost-cutting across the government evidently engaging in such abusive spending."

Thomas Jefferson, in an 1821 letter to Spencer Roane, [explained](#) how lavish government spending can be ignited from a big, ever-growing government: "The multiplication of public offices, increase of expense beyond income, growth and entailment of a public debt, are indications soliciting the employment of the pruning knife."

Photo of Brian Miller: AP Images



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