



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on May 1, 2012

The GSA and Government Waste

When the General Services Administration's Las Vegas party that cost taxpayers more than \$800,000 made national news, even [congressional Democrats got outraged](#).

After all, the GSA is the federal agency created to bring efficiency in purchases across the different departments of the federal government. Essentially, the GSA is the federal government's landlord and purchasing agent.



The irony of the government's "efficiency" agency wasting money is bad. But it wasn't just the money wasted. GSA employees bragged about and sang missives to the waste of taxpayer money. The pinnacle of the conference was a video contest, one where Hawaiian GSA employee Hank Terlaje sang about his wishes to waste money. Now, Terlaje's video was done as a lark, musically it had merit, and Terlaje had the good sense to have himself arrested at the end of his video for wasting taxpayer funds. But people were outraged because he was singing about wasting money while his agency *was* wasting money. And the GSA officials in charge were wasting money for real, whereas Terlaje was just musing about it. (Click [here](#) to watch video.)

The organizer of the conference Jeff Neely (above), also boasted in a telecast from the convention that the conference needed to be replicated nationally. That a high official of a federal government efficiency agency wanted to replicate this waste of taxpayer dollars raises serious questions, or should raise serious questions. And Congress did hold hearings in April, asking Neely some questions. Neely [responded](#) with an invocation of his Fifth Amendment right to remain silent. Neely's response should perhaps not be unexpected, as the GSA Inspector General found four different possible violations of law in Neely's nearly million dollar party.

But this is conference is not an isolated case of wasted taxpayer dollars. The Office of the Inspector General [report](#) on the GSA conference also noted that there have been multiple instances of waste, bribery, and other misuse of taxpayer dollars. The OIG report tried to paint a positive picture on its report, noting that nobody exerted political pressure to try to stop the report. The author even [noted](#) that usually, the GSA's OIG is able to get much of the wasted funds back from officials who have been fired or prosecuted.

That's not really the point. It's not just one incident, or one agency. There's the gun-walking scandal where the federal agency in charge of keeping guns out of the wrong hands — the ATF — [gave 1,500 high powered weapons to the Sinaloa drug cartel of Mexico](#), the so-called "Fast and Furious" program. The billions of dollars the U.S. government wasted on [propping up dictators such as Hosni Mubarak](#), only to create hatred of this country, [studies](#) to analyze methane emissions from cattle, and studies on the sex lives of various insects, and on and on.

Whether it's the most recent [Secret Service scandal](#), or Boston's "[Big Dig](#)" — which was several hundred percent over budget — there's a pattern about government itself. It's inefficient by its very nature. Yes, the U.S. government needs watchdogs like the Office of the Inspector General auditing government programs, but that's only a band-aid to the real solution. The inefficiency will continue as



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long as the federal government keeps doing as much as it is doing. Consider the case of the annual audit of federal program duplication by the U.S. General Accounting Office, another watchdog on top of the office of the inspector general in each agency. The GAO [revealed](#) in 2011 that there were more than 84 cases where the federal government had multiple agencies responsible for performing the same task. 35 different programs responsible for infrastructure, and an amazing 52 different programs responsible for promoting entrepreneurship. Government-sponsored “entrepreneurship” is itself a contradiction, but does the federal government really need 52 different programs to promote what should be a private matter anyway?

When the GAO revisited its overlap programs in a [second report](#) released on February 28 of this year, they found that only five percent of the 84 different program overlaps they found were put under a single agency. And they found an additional 54 new programs that had overlapped with programs.

And that’s the lesson to take away from the GSA scandal: There is no way to make government efficient, and as government gets bigger, it always gets less efficient. So the only way to contain the damage to the economy is to limit the size of government as a whole.

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