



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on April 6, 2012

## Federal Agency Under Investigation for Expensive Taxpayer-Funded Trip

The conference was hosted at a luxury hotel, and featured a \$3,200 mindreader, \$6,300 worth of commemorative coin sets, and a \$75,000 training exercise where attendees tried to build a bicycle. Additionally, the airfare and lodging cost roughly \$147,000.

Officials at the Public Buildings Service were captured on camera laughing about the expense of the summit's "capstone" event in October of 2010. Fox News [reports](#), "One official joked about how much was spent at a party hosted by the agency's commissioner. Another employee, in a mock music video, even sang about how he'd "never be under OIG investigation."



In that video, an employee is pretending to be performing in a fake music video, which includes jokes that only his colleagues would understand.

The employee sings: "Donate my vacation, love to the nation, I'll never be under OIG investigation."

The House Oversight and Government Reform Committee posted online that video of the employees at the General Services Administration.

The employee in the video was later given an award at the conference and named "commissioner for a day." In the award speech, an official identified as Public Buildings Service Deputy Commissioner David Foley joked that "there's just a couple of small matters. The hotel would like to talk to you about paying for the party that was held in the commissioner's suite last night," he said, to laughter from the crowd.

The party referenced in that joke, hosted by the real commissioner in his loft suite for senior officials, cost nearly \$2,000.

According to the OIG report, this and other parties hosted in Las Vegas during that trip did not "fit any legal authority for GSA to spend funds on food."

Robert Peck, Public Building Services Commissioner, was terminated following the report, as well as another official and the chief from the GSA.

On Thursday, a GSA spokesman repudiated the contents of the video from the conference: "This video is another example of the complete lack of judgment exhibited during the 2010 Western Regions Conference. Our agency continues to be appalled by this indefensible behavior, and we are taking every step possible to ensure that nothing like this ever happens again."

During a briefing on Thursday by the Office of the Inspector General, House Oversight Committee Chairman Darrell Issa (R-Calif.) said that former General Services Administrator Martha Johnson and Steven Leeds, former senior counselor to the Administrator, knew of the investigation of the conference in May of 2011. "This administration knew about the spending scandal 11 months ago and they didn't



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act until this week," Issa declared.

Spending by the GSA and its buildings service has provoked attention from lawmakers in Washington. Fox News reports, "Republicans on the House transportation committee on Thursday wrote a letter to the GSA inspector general asking for information about an incentive program they claim handed out '\$200,000 worth of taxpayer funded iPods, electronics and gift cards for questionable reasons at best.'"

Rep. Jeff Denham of California has accused the Obama administration of treating "hardworking taxpayer dollars like their own private slush fund."

The investigation into the GSA's spending habits inspired the nonprofit group Cause of Action to write a letter to other federal departments asking them to release information about their own spending on "commemorative" items, particularly as the GSA was accused of spending more than \$6,000 on commemorative coins at the conference in Las Vegas.

"When the White House was informed of the Inspector General's findings we acted quickly to determine who was responsible for such a gross misuse of taxpayer dollars," White House Chief of Staff Jack Lew said in a statement to the *Washington Post*. President Obama "was outraged by the excessive spending, questionable dealings with contractors, and disregard for taxpayer dollars," Lew said, "and called for all those responsible to be held fully accountable."

Ironically, however, despite the outrage of President Obama over the Las Vegas conference, the First Family seems to be the biggest violators of excessive leisure spending with taxpayer dollars. In December 2011, the *Blaze* [reported](#) on the Obama family's Hawaiian vacation, which cost an estimated \$4 million dollars, of which taxpayers paid a large chunk. The *Blaze* broke down the reason for the massive expense:

To begin, the family is traveling separately, as Obama has had plenty to wrap up in Washington, D.C. before the holidays (i.e. the payroll tax cut drama). So, First Lady Michelle Obama already left for the family's tropical getaway — a \$100,000 expenditure, including personnel, travel and security.

Obama's round-trip flight to Hawaii on Air Force One [is estimated to be the largest expense](#) associated with the vacation. According to the Air Force, it apparently costs \$181,757 per flight hour to run the nation's most secure (and probably its most lavish) aircraft. Thus, the total for the nine-hour trip from Washington to Hawaii and then back again will come in at \$3,271,611.

The Obamas also received negative attention when they vacationed in Martha's Vineyard because Michelle and Barack arrived four hours apart from one another on government jets. Likewise, the First Family drew ire when it was learned that their rental of the Blue Heron Farm property during their stay in the Vineyard cost an estimated \$50,000 a week.

In 2011, White House sources [claimed](#) that the First Lady spent \$10 million of American taxpayer money on vacations in just one year.

The *Daily Mail* reported, "The First Lady is believed to have taken 42 days of holiday in the past year, including a \$375,000 break in Spain and a four-day ski trip to Vail, Colorado, where she spent \$2,000 a night on a suite in the Sebastian hotel."

One of the anonymous sources from the White House said this of Michelle Obama:

Michelle also enjoys drinking expensive booze during her trips. She favors martinis with top-shelf vodka and has a taste for rich sparkling wines.



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The vacations are totally Michelle's idea. She's like a junkie. She can't schedule enough getaways, and she lives from one to the next — all the while sticking it to hardworking Americans.

While it is indeed true that the Obama family foots some of their own vacation expenses, the website [whitehousedossier.com](#) indicates that the amount paid for by the Obama family is “dwarfed by the overall cost to the public.”

The Obama family has already been criticized for taking family vacations while millions of Americans remain out of work, or are financially in the hole, but the extravagance of their vacations has seemingly been the bigger source of contempt.

Critics have noted that it's not hard to see why members of the GSA do not bat an eye at an expensive vacation in Las Vegas when they are seemingly taking a page out of the Obama family's book.



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