



*News From The ...*

## COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

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### Miller Calls on VA to Take Responsibility for Errant Spending

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Today, Rep. Jeff Miller, Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, issued the following statement on [the final findings of VA's Office of Inspector General investigation into two VA Human Resources Conferences held in Orlando, Florida, last year](#):

"Today's findings by VA's OIG demonstrate a clear lack of leadership and accountability when it comes to VA senior leadership being good stewards of taxpayer dollars.

"Senior leaders took no action to stem excessive conferences costs, and in fact, [endorsed and approved costs without proper oversight](#). Despite [repeated attempts by Congress to rein in conference costs](#), this report demonstrates that some senior VA leaders have given little attention to how veteran funding is being spent and VA lacks an adequate system of checks and balances to ensure this type of abuse does not occur.

"Funding allocated for these conferences was drawn from VA medical accounts, which could have been used toward providing hundreds of veterans with VA healthcare. Furthermore, numerous unauthorized commitments were made for these two conferences, which have yet to be resolved, including the funding and making of the [Patton-style videos](#). And, the OIG found that VA employees acted on their own, without regard to the law or advice from VA's General Counsel, to seek, and receive, concessions from the hotel, some in order to bring their families to enjoy a VA-paid vacation. The report also calls into question Interagency Agreements that helped to fund these conferences, and provided what VA has called 'freebies' for attendees. Of particular concern is funding that came through the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

"It is blatantly clear that VA does not know how much it spends on conferences. That has been apparent from contradictory information provided to the Committee in [testimony](#) and [documents](#). But to put this specific conference into context, the OIG found that \$762,197 of the overall costs were wasteful. As a comparison, the entire GSA conference held last year in Las Vegas totaled \$823,000.

"This sort of funny money accounting must stop, and will no longer be tolerated, especially in today's tight fiscal climate. Without a doubt, this appears to be a systemic problem at VA, and using the figures based in today's report, [it can be reasonably concluded that 10-15 percent of VA's conference spending is wasteful, amounting to \\$10-15 million a year](#), at the least. I am calling on VA to review these findings, and take appropriate action, especially at the senior management level."

[Overview of VA's Office of Inspector General \(OIG\) findings, which has led to the resignation of John Sepulveda, VA's Assistant Secretary for Human Resources:](#)

- \$6.1 million was spent on the two Human Resources conferences in Orlando, not \$5.1 million as previously stated by VA.

- VA employees improperly accepted gifts including room upgrades, meals, limousine services, golf, spa services, helicopter rides, and tickets for the Rockettes.
- Contract violations and lack of oversight led to excessive costs and illegal or wasteful expenditures.
- There was inappropriate use of government purchase cards.
- \$97,906 VA spent on promotional items (including bags, pens, water bottles, and exercise bands) were determined to unnecessary and wasteful.

**To learn more about the investigation and to read the full VA OIG report, click [here](#).**

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