

Top 10 VA Boondoggles

The Department of Veterans Affairs has the money to reform its health care system. In fact, the Veteran's Health Administration's budget this year is \$57.28 billion, which is equal to \$6,300 per veteran served. The following examples highlight instances where the VA carelessly wasted its resources:

1. **\$600 Million + “Crown Jewel” Hospital in Nevada Not Living Up To Its Name**

The VA constructed a new \$600 million plus (actual costs were reported as closer to \$1 billion) hospital in North Las Vegas that was coined “the Crown Jewel of the VA Healthcare System.” However, since its opening in 2012, the VA is now paying an additional \$16 million to expand and update the emergency room as the original ER was insufficient to meet patient needs. Further, the VA hospital has been unable to adequately staff the medical facility with physicians, and many Nevada veterans still have to travel to different states for certain services and procedures.

2. **VA Pays Out \$845 Million in Ten Years for Malpractice and Wrongful Death Claims**

Over the past ten years, the VA has paid out \$845 million in malpractice claims. \$200 million of these malpractice costs were in the form of wrongful death payments in an attempt to compensate families of veterans' who died at the Department's expense. \$36 million was used to settle 167 claims in which the words “delay in treatment” were used to describe the alleged malpractice.

3. **VA Construction Projects Rack Up Billions in Cost Overruns**

In 2013, four major VA construction projects ended up costing significantly more than projected, accounting for combined cost overruns of nearly \$1.5 billion. Scheduling delays for 4 projects – in Las Vegas, Orlando, Denver and New Orleans – ranged from 14 to 74 months. On average, each individual VA medical facility construction project is 35 months late and \$360 million over budget.

4. **VA Spends Almost \$500 Million on Conference Rooms and Curtains**

Over a four-and-a-half year period, the VA spent \$489 million on embellishing its office spaces. Highlights of these “office makeovers” include \$6.8 million to construct one conference room in Illinois, \$1.8 million on office furniture in Puerto Rico, and \$10.7 million on curtains and draperies nationwide.

5. **VA Spends Billions on IT with Mixed Results**

The VA has spent \$3.9 billion on 32 IT investments this fiscal year (many of which are behind schedule and over cost – though the data is limited because of inconsistent updates and discrepancies within the VA's internal project management dashboard). In 2007, an investigation found the VA had the worst track record in the entire government for estimating the cost of IT projects. Over 90 percent of the time, VA IT projects ran over their initial budget estimates.

6. **VA Pays Millions to Department Employees to Perform Union Duties**

Many VA employees spend their days not caring for veterans, but rather themselves. “Official time” is a statutory entitlement that allows paid time off for government workers from assigned

governmental duties in order to represent a union or its bargaining unit employees. As of February 2013, there were 277 VA employees performing as union representatives on 100 percent official time. In 2011, the VA spent \$42,565,000 in costs related to maintaining official time employees (this number includes payroll costs, salary, and benefits).

7. VA Spends Millions on Lavish Conferences

While veterans suffer waiting to receive medical care, benefits, and other services, VA employees are squandering funds appropriated to the Department. In 2011, the Department spent over \$220,000 on an 11-day conference VA employees at a Scottsdale, Arizona resort. That same year, the VA held two more training conferences in Orlando, costing a combined \$6.1 million – with at least \$762,000 wasted. Questionable purchases at the Orlando conference included karaoke machines and artisan cheese displays, \$184,000 worth of breakfast sandwiches, \$16,500 for the production of “happy face” videos featuring daily recaps of conference events, close to \$100,000 worth of promotional favors, and \$50,000 for the production of a video parody.

- Note: While VA employees are lining up in buffet lines at conferences in luxury hotels, more than one in four veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan are going hungry. A recent study surveyed 922 United States veterans and shockingly discovered that 27 percent reported they were not able to feed themselves three times a day. This number is “drastically higher” than the 14.5 percent national average.

8. VA Spends Millions on Employee Travel

In 2010, the VA spent \$80 million on travel-related expenses for its employees. VA spending on employee travel was brought to light in 2011 when the IG revealed that a senior VA administrator billed the federal government more than \$130,000 for his weekly commute to Washington. The VA not only paid for the official’s weekly commute, but it also picked up hotel and meal expenses so the individual would not have to relocate.

9. VA Spends Over \$500,000 on Artwork and Photographs to Decorate its Facilities

In 2013, the VA purchased \$562,000 worth of artwork to decorate various agency facilities. A VA spokesperson described the art as “motivational and calming, professionally designed to enhance clinical operations.”

10. VA Spends Millions on Vacant, Dilapidated, and Unused Properties

VA maintains thousands of buildings throughout the country, many of which are empty, unused, or too rundown to utilize – some of them are even considered to be health hazards. Despite this, the VA continues to shell out millions of dollars to maintain these abandoned and dilapidated buildings, including a pink octagonal monkey house in Dayton, Ohio. In 2013, VA estimates it spent approximately \$20.2 million on 922 vacant and underutilized properties.