

**Amendment 3230 -- To ensure Department of Justice conference spending does not fund excessive travel, lavish meals and snacks, and organizations linked to terrorism.**

The Department of Justice has attracted attention recently for its lavish spending on conferences, including its support for a convention held by an organization linked with terrorism.

The amendment would cap Department of Justice (DoJ) conference spending at \$15 million over the next twelve months and prohibit the Department from providing financial support to a conference or convention of any organization listed as unindicted co-conspirator in a U.S. federal court.

**Investigations Have Found DoJ Conference Spending to Be Excessive and “Extravagant”**

DoJ spent approximately \$312 million on conferences between 2000 and 2006, according to the Department. The annual amount has more than doubled during this period, rising steadily from \$34 million in 2000 to nearly \$58 million in 2004.

DOJ Conference Spending, 2000-2006

Fiscal Year	Amount Spent
2000	\$34,269,823
2001	\$33,789,624
2002	\$47,008,880
2003	\$52,662,084
2004	\$57,980,001
2005	\$40,217,283
2006	\$45,944,001
Total	\$311,871,696
% Increase	34%

Only two federal Departments—the Departments of Defense and Health and Human Services—have spent more on conferences than DoJ since 2000. Beyond those two large departments, no other’s conference costs come anywhere near to DoJ’s expenses. In fact, since 2000 DoJ has spent nearly

twice the amount on conferences as the State Department, which is expected to convene meetings throughout the world for diplomatic purposes.<sup>[1]</sup>

In 2006, DoJ sent 26,164 employees to 2,199 conferences, according to an investigation by the Senate Subcommittee on Federal Financial Management.

An audit by the DoJ Office of Inspector General (OIG) released this month found the department spent nearly \$7 million to plan, host or send employees to ten conferences over the last two years. This included paying \$4 per meatball at one lavish dinner and spreading an average of \$25 worth of snacks around to each participant at a movie-themed party.<sup>[2]</sup>

More than \$13,000 was spent on cookies and brownies for 1,542 people who attended a four-day "Weed and Seed" conference in August 2005, according to the audit by Inspector General Glenn A. Fine.

A "networking" session replete with butterfly shrimp, coconut lobster skewers and Swedish meatballs at a Community Oriented Policing Services conference in July 2006 cost more than \$60,000.

The OIG report, which looked at the 10 priciest Justice Department conferences between October 2004 and September 2006, was ordered by the Senate Appropriations Committee.

It also found that three-quarters of the employees who attended the conferences demanded daily reimbursement for the cost of meals while traveling-- effectively double-dipping into government funds.

Auditors "found that using appropriated funds to pay for expensive meals and snacks at certain DOJ conferences, while allowable, appear to have been extravagant," the report concluded.

The most expensive conference on the list was a \$1.4 million meeting, in Denver in May 2006, to discuss Project Safe Neighborhood. Planners spent \$143,469 on microphones, video screens and other technical equipment; \$108,866 on food and drinks; and \$638,371 on travel costs to send employees to the conference, the audit showed.

In all, the department spent \$6.9 million on the 10 conferences reviewed by the OIG.

---

<sup>[1]</sup> The State Department has spent \$162,580,243 on conference related costs between 2000 and 2006.

<sup>[2]</sup> Lara Jakes Jordan. "Snacks Take Big Bite Out of DOJ Budget," Washington Post/Associated Press, September 14, 2007; <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/09/14/AR2007091401260.html>

## **DoJ Not Capable of Determining Actual Conference Costs, According to Audit**

The OIG audit of DoJ conference spending found “The DOJ does not maintain a single financial system capable of providing the costs of DOJ conferences. As a result, when asked to provide conference expenditures to Congress, DOJ components did not uniformly report these expenditures. Our audit found that some components reported budgeted, awarded, and estimated conference costs instead of actual expenses, while others did not uniformly include travel or personnel costs.”<sup>[3]</sup>

Furthermore, the auditors noted “Federal agencies have considerable discretion in deciding how much to spend on a conference” and “some of the incurred expenses, while allowable, appear to have been extravagant.”

This lack of formal guidelines and considerable discretion appear to contribute to the Department’s excessive spending, lavish expenses as well as support for questionable conferences.

## **DoJ Supported a Convention By a Group Linked to Terrorism**

Earlier this month, the Justice Department co-sponsored a convention held by the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) — an unindicted co-conspirator in an ongoing federal terrorist funding case.

This was not the first year that DoJ expended federal funds for this organization’s gathering. Justice spokesman Erik Ablin has confirmed that “the division has had tables at the convention in previous years.”

ISNA is one of more than 300 unindicted co-conspirators in a case against the Holy Land Foundation, whose top officers are accused of raising money for Hamas.

“Justice lawyers have objected to the affiliation with ISNA, fearing it will undermine the case against the Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development in Dallas,” according to recent press reports<sup>[4]</sup>

---

<sup>[3]</sup> “DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE CONFERENCE EXPENDITURES,” Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General Audit Division, Audit Report 07-42, September 2007;

<http://www.usdoj.gov/oig/reports/plus/a0742/final.pdf>

<sup>[4]</sup> Audrey Hudson. “U.S. sponsors Islamic convention,” Washington Times, August 27, 2007;

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070827/NATION/108270070/1002>

"There is outrage among lawyers that the Department of Justice is funding a group named as a co-conspirator in a terrorist financing case," said a Justice lawyer who spoke to The Washington Times.

According to an e-mail from Susana Lorenzo-Giguere, acting deputy chief of DoJ's Voting Rights Division, the sponsorship involved sending government lawyers to man a booth for the Labor Day weekend event in Illinois.

"This is an important outreach opportunity, and a chance to reach a community that is at once very much discriminated against, and very wary of the national government and its willingness to protect them," Mrs. Lorenzo-Giguere said in an e-mail to other DoJ employees.

"It would be a great step forward to break through those barriers. And Chicago is lovely this time of year," Mrs. Lorenzo-Giguere wrote.

The Justice Department declined to say how much the sponsorship will cost.

A DoJ lawyer who took issue with the Department's support of the convention said "This will cost thousands of dollars" and that "This just staggering, it's outrageous."<sup>[5]</sup>

The lawyer pointed to a morning session on "the threat and reality of U.S.-sponsored torture" as contrary to the department's mission. The Justice Department was responsible for signing off on the legality and constitutionality of interrogation techniques.

According to the schedule of events, "The extensive news coverage by the U.S. and international media sources makes it all too clear that the grim abuses in Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo Bay, and the sending of detainees to secret prisons around the world that are known to torture during interrogations, are not isolated incidents, but rather constitute policy of the U.S. government. ... This session will describe the nature of U.S.-sponsored torture, the effects of torture on its victims, the efforts of the U.S. religious community, and what you can do to help end U.S.-sponsored torture," the schedule said.

A second lawyer responded to Mrs. Lorenzo-Giguere's e-mail questioning the participation and said it "seems like an odd time for one part of DOJ to lend credence and visible support to ISNA at the same time DOJ prosecutors will be called on to defend their decision to name ISNA as a conspirator."

"Presumably the prosecutors have determined that they might need that testimony admitted; I hope we don't undermine their position," the second lawyer

---

<sup>[5]</sup> Audrey Hudson. "U.S. sponsors Islamic convention," Washington Times, August 27, 2007; <http://www.washingtontimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070827/NATION/108270070/1002>

said. "Needless to say, [the Holy Land Foundation trial] is a very significant case."

### **This Amendment Helps DoJ Better Prioritize Its Spending and Mission**

Capping DoJ's conferences and prohibiting the Department from supporting conferences held by organizations linked to terrorism will assist DoJ better prioritize both its spending and mission.

The Department would have to better track conference related spending, which would hopefully eliminate extravagant amounts from being spent on snacks or events that do not promote the mission of the Department.

Clearly, in the post-9/11 world, the tens of millions of dollars spent every year on conference by the Department of Justice could be much better spent on investigating and prosecuting terrorists.