



(January 11, 2016)

In order to further improve the lines of communication and to respond to the concerns between the National VA Council and you our members, I have established a National VA Council Briefing. This NVAC Briefing will bring you the latest news and developments within DVA and provide you with the current status of issues this Council is currently addressing. I believe that this NVAC Briefing will greatly enhance the way in which we communicate and the way in which we share new information, keeping you better informed.

Alma L. Lee
National VA Council, President

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**In This Briefing: [Bring Federal Conferences Back to Las Vegas, Lawmakers Say](#)**

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A bipartisan group of House members from Nevada want to eliminate bans on federal agencies holding conferences in casinos or resort locations.

[The bill](#)—proposed by Republican Reps. Mark Amodei and Joe Heck, and Democratic Reps. Dina Titus and Steven Horsford—says such prohibitions are counterproductive and unfairly target areas with high numbers of resort and vacation locations.

[The lawmakers say](#) agencies are moving to more expensive venues because they want to “avoid any stigma associated with the ‘resort or ‘casino’ name,” even when these sites may actually provide federal agencies and taxpayers a better deal.

“These prohibitions emphasize optics over real fiscal restraint,” Amodei said in a statement.

The proposed legislation comes a little more than a year after revelations the General Services Administration [dropped \\$820,000](#) on a 2010 training conference in Las Vegas. Several agency executives were [dismissed](#) or resigned from their positions in the [aftermath](#) of the scandal, including former GSA Administrator Martha Johnson, and agencies across government tightened their travel and conference spending.

Some agencies, including those within the Agriculture, Justice and Homeland Security departments, have implemented formal bans prohibiting travel to resort locations.

Heck said the abundance of conference spaces in Nevada cities make the state a haven for taxpayer-friendly federal training conferences and trips, with fierce competition driving down prices. He emphasized that local economies should not suffer because of the actions of a few.

“Resort cities like Las Vegas are not the problem here,” Heck said. “Irresponsible federal workers are.”

Joe Newman, a spokesman for the watchdog group Project on Government Oversight, said the primary issue is the cost of federal conferences, not the location.

“No matter where the conference is held, we expect that agencies remember that they're spending the taxpayer's money and not theirs,” Newman said. “They should use that as their guiding principle when they're negotiating rates, booking entertainment and filling swag bags.”