

GSA CONTROVERSIAL AWARDS PROGRAM



Under heavy criticism for rampant abuse in an employee rewards program that left \$28,000 worth of iPods either stolen or missing, a federal agency is under fire for spending \$823,000 on an outrageous Las Vegas conference. Under GSA's "Hats Off Program," employees receive award points and can redeem them for prizes such as iPods, digital cameras and gift cards, according to an inspector general's report. As it turns out, those responsible for administering the program received the most awards. GSA also had problems keeping track of the goodies; 115 iPods valued at \$20,000 could not be accounted for, while another 40 iPods were stolen from the Philip Burton Federal Building in San Francisco. Initially started with employees receiving mugs, mousepads and backpacks with GSA logos on them for good service, the program accelerated within the next four years into the high-end electronics and ballooned up to \$212,000 by 2009. Reps. John Mica, R-Fla., and Jeff Denham, R-Calif., say the program has ultimately degenerated into a taxpayer funded give away where employees handed out iPods to their office buddies for almost any reason. The ongoing scandal forced the resignation last week of GSA Administrator Martha Johnson and the removals of Public Buildings Service Commissioner Bob Peck and Johnson's chief of staff Stephen Leeds. According to reports, The GSA, the real estate agency for federal buildings, has said that the program has ended pending a continuing top down review of all spending. Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., chairwoman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, said her committee will hold a hearing on the GSA report Wednesday. According to unconfirmed reports, the \$825,000 spent by GSA in Vegas is just the tip of the iceberg. While causing massive layoffs and business closures at hundreds of other small businesses throughout the country, the agency is favoring two large contractors and 13 small ones and is receiving a kickback of a 2% fee of all the money they funnel to these contractors, allegedly to the tune of \$9,463,066. In a video to employees released Tuesday newly appointed acting GSA Administrator Dan Tangherlini stated the agency will review all spending at the agency. "This is a clear expression to our customers and the taxpayer that GSA employees understand that serving our customers well is reward enough."

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