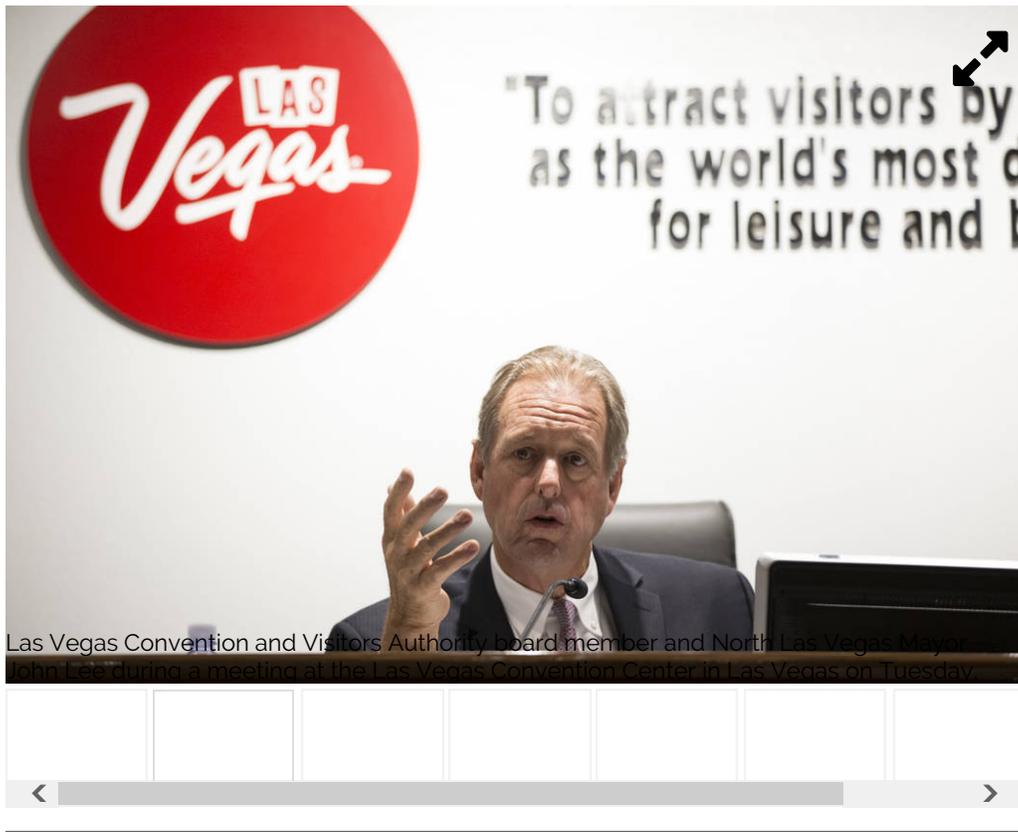




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After RJ investigation, LVCVA hires firm to review spending policies



Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority board member and North Las Vegas Mayor John Lee during a meeting at the Las Vegas Convention Center in Las Vegas on Tuesday.

By Jeff German, Arthur Kane and Brian Joseph Las Vegas Review-Journal
August 8, 2017 - 2:31 pm



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Updated August 8, 2017 - 4:56 pm

The Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority hired an accounting firm Tuesday to evaluate its spending policies after a Review-Journal investigation uncovered (<https://www.reviewjournal.com/local/local-las-vegas/lvcva-spends-millions-to-wine-and-dine-but-some-question-spending/>) questionable expenses (<https://www.reviewjournal.com/local/local-las-vegas/lvcva-spends-millions-to-wine-and-dine-but-some-question-spending/>).

The publicly funded authority will pay Piercy Bowler Taylor & Kern \$15,000 to recommend changes at an October board meeting.

"Allegations were brought forth, and I want to make sure we're doing the public's work and protecting the taxpayers," said North Las Vegas Mayor John Lee, who chairs the policy committee of the agency's board.

In April, the Review-Journal detailed how the convention authority spent millions of taxpayer dollars on high-end entertainment, gifts for employees and first-class trips for board members. The lavish purchases at times had little or no business purpose and routinely broke the agency's own rules, the investigation found.

The expenses included buying thousands of bottles of wine that cost more than the \$100 limit, along with \$300 steaks that exceeded the policy of picking sensibly priced menu items. Some tickets purchased for events did not appear to be business related.

The chairman of the audit committee, Bill Noonan, said in April that his panel might direct auditors to scrutinize some of the expenses.

Lee said Tuesday the accounting firm will also examine policies other than those involving expense accounts. The review is aimed at maintaining the professionalism of the board and how it deals with taxpayer money, he said.

Richard Bowler, a principal of the firm, which has been the convention authority's outside auditor since 2008, declined to discuss specifics. He said he could not recall the Review-Journal's findings.

"At this point, I'm not aware of any violations of policy that have occurred, but we haven't really looked at it," he said.

The policy committee took a few minutes to unanimously approve the contract with no debate and no reference to the questions raised in the Review-Journal investigation. Several times Lee and the convention authority's legal counsel, Luke Puschnig, described the review as standard operating procedure.

In the three years ending in July 2016, the convention authority paid at least \$697,000 for alcohol, \$85,000 to hire showgirls and hundreds of thousands more dollars for concert tickets, skyboxes, banquets, exotic car rides and jewelry for employees, records reviewed by the Review-Journal showed. Board Chairman and Clark County Commissioner Lawrence Weekly also received \$1,000 in concert tickets that he conceded had no business purpose.

In June, the Review-Journal reported that the convention authority spent taxpayer dollars assigning security officers to provide dozens of rides to CEO Rossi Ralenkotter and its chief "ambassador," former Las Vegas Mayor Oscar Goodman.

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Security logs over three years showed officers escorted Ralenkotter and Goodman to casinos, shops and other locations so often that staff members dubbed the dispatches "Rossi runs" and "Oscar runs."

Goodman, a former convention authority board chairman, is not an employee at the agency. He has a contract that pays him \$72,000 annually to greet visitors at public events with a martini in hand and a showgirl on each arm. His wife, Las Vegas Mayor Carolyn Goodman, is a current authority board member.

Ralenkotter has defended the authority's spending as part of the agency's "relationship building" to attract tourists and stay ahead of its competition.

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