

# Las Vegas

February 10, 2009

President Barack Obama  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

It has come to my attention that the subject of Las Vegas came up in your town hall discussion in Elkhart, Indiana, on Monday, February 9. The conversation came about during the question and answer session where you discussed the distribution of funds from the stimulus package and how the money will be used. In addressing a specific question about financial institutions, you said, "... But, you know, you (financial institutions) are not going to be able to give out these big bonuses until you pay taxpayers back. You can't get corporate jets. You can't go take a trip to Las Vegas or go down to the Super Bowl on the taxpayer's dime. There's got to be some accountability and some responsibility, and that's something that I intend to impose as president of the United States."

Mr. President, I understand the enormous burden you carry in dealing with the worst economy since the Great Depression. I also understand the need for accountability, but your comments are harmful to the meetings and convention industry as a whole and Las Vegas specifically.

They reinforced the stereotype – unjustified I may add – that meetings, events and incentive travel are wasteful and any trip to Las Vegas is a "junket." Meetings are the foundation for any successful business venture. The meeting and event industry creates 2.4 million jobs, injects more than \$200 billion into the national economy every year, and generates \$39 billion in federal, state and local tax revenue.

Yes, leisure visitors come to Las Vegas to take a break and escape the day-to-day pressures. They enjoy our world-class resorts, exquisite culinary, amazing shopping, entertainment, and gaming. The perception that Las Vegas is merely a leisure destination to play is antiquated.

Business travelers also come to Las Vegas and they conduct serious business. Research shows that events in Las Vegas attract more delegates, attract corporate decision-makers, and keep convention delegates focused on getting business done compared to other destinations.

Las Vegas hosts 22,000 meetings and 6 million business travelers annually for an economic impact of \$8.5 billion. These individuals represent Fortune 500 companies and major

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conventions and trade shows such as International Consumer Electronics Show, International Builders Show and National Association of Broadcasters. The meetings and convention industry directly employs more than 46,000 Southern Nevadans, more than 75,000 indirectly.

Las Vegas resorts are international companies, many publicly traded on Wall Street, which are committed to providing the best possible meeting experience for all of their business clients. They provide unparalleled facilities, amenities, and service to ensure that meeting attendees are able to accomplish their business goals. Over the next several years, Las Vegas resorts will invest \$20 billion in the local economy. That translates into more jobs and an even better experience for the customers.

Like other communities, Las Vegas is feeling the effects of the recession. Unemployment reached a 25-year high – 9.1 percent – in December. Small business owners, public service employees, unions, and private industry are all being forced to make very difficult decisions.

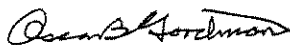
The tourism industry is the major economic driver for the entire State of Nevada. In Las Vegas, it represents nearly one-third of all the jobs, and generates almost \$28 billion for the economy. Las Vegas hosted 37.5 million visitors in 2008 and led the nation in hotel occupancy rates at 86 percent.

Las Vegas is an active member of the United States Travel Association, Meeting Professionals International, and other industry organizations that have been working with your administration to develop a set of guidelines for corporations that receive federal assistance to define how money may be spent on meetings, events, and incentive travel. Collaboratively, reasonable people can find reasonable solutions.

The assumption that all meetings, events, and incentive travel are wasteful is wrong. Now more than ever, we need businesses to travel and hold meetings and events. As we move forward, I would caution all federally elected officials to use temperance in their comments. Failure to heed these principles will damage an entire industry, and select cities, causing people to lose their jobs and homes.

Further, I would ask you and members of Congress to refrain from calling out individual cities or destinations. That serves no purpose and only reinforces outdated stereotypes. Yes, we need accountability, but we also need some balance in the discussion.

Respectfully,



Oscar B. Goodman  
Mayor, City of Las Vegas  
Chairman of the Board, Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority