

Nevada lawmakers unite to prevent state from being black listed by feds

By Erin Kelly, Gannett

WASHINGTON – The Lake Tahoe and Reno area tourism industry shouldn't have to suffer because of the reckless spending of some federal bureaucrats-gone-wild.

That's the premise of legislation proposed Wednesday by Rep. Shelley Berkley, D-Las Vegas, and Sen. Dean Heller, R-Nev. The two lawmakers want to ensure that Reno and Las Vegas won't be blacklisted by the U.S. government in the wake of the recent Las Vegas spending scandal involving federal employees.

U.S. General Services Administration officials authorized \$823,000 for an October 2010 conference for 300 employees in Las Vegas that included private parties, a psychic, a talent show and a \$75,000 bicycle-building exercise, according to an inspector general's report published this month. GSA officials also spent \$130,000 on eight planning trips to Las Vegas in advance of the conference, the report says.

The scandal led to the resignation of the agency's top official, the firing of two top aides and the punishment of several others.

Congress is investigating the spending, and there has been criticism by some lawmakers, including Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., about federal employees meeting in Las Vegas and other cities known as gambling destinations.

Berkley fears a return to a policy by the Bush administration that effectively barred federal employees from holding meetings in casino cities such as Reno and Las Vegas even when

those cities offered the cheapest rates. That policy was reversed by the Obama administration at the urging of Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev.

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