

Press Reports and Audits on Governmental Waste, Fraud and Mismanagement

Compiled by the California Taxpayers' Association

Public Events

Y2K Party Deficit

Dollar Amount: \$1,200,000

Instead of making a profit, the city of San Rafael (Marin County) lost \$1.2 million when only 6,100 people showed up for a high-profile New Year's Eve bash. To break even, the \$2.6 million event, featuring Bonnie Raitt, Huey Lewis and Jerry Lee Lewis, plus a \$22,000 balloon drop, needed to sell 11,000 tickets. The loss represents 2.5 percent of the city's 1999-2000 budget, and, officials said the loss would be covered by redevelopment funds and a general fund surplus. The legality of using downtown redevelopment funds to cover any part of the loss was questioned by Marin County Auditor-Controller Richard Arrow. "The Y2K party, although a city-sponsored endeavor, is not a redevelopment project," Mr. Arrow said in Marin Independent Journal coverage of the story. The paper quoted a San Rafael resident, Roy Gordon, as saying that it was "very stupid" to charge between \$225 and \$300 for tickets. (2000)

Region: Bay Area

Jurisdiction: County

Source: Cal Tax Digest - Nov. 2001

Party, Party, Party, etc...

Dollar Amount: \$1,000,000

Los Angeles Mayor Richard Riordan's proposal to spend \$1 million on five regional New Year's Eve 1999 celebrations has drawn outrage from the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association (HJTA). "What are they celebrating, that they have an extra \$1 million to spend on parties?" asked Kris Vosburgh, executive director of the HJTA, in an April 22 Los Angeles Times report. Mayor Riordan said regional arts councils will host the celebrations, bringing the city together and also projecting a positive image of the city. Mr. Vosburgh said the mayor and members of the city council have said the city lacks money for needed infrastructure improvements, and they pushed an unsuccessful \$744 million bond measure for police and fire-fighting facilities. "Obviously, the taxpayers are paying for this party," he said. "I think they would rather see the money spent on more practical things, like renovated police and fire facilities."

Region: So. California

Jurisdiction: City

Source: LA Times - Apr. 22, 1999

Taxpayers Get Speared by Asparagus Festival

Dollar Amount: \$526,299

Taxpayers in Stockton paid \$526,299 for this year's Asparagus Festival – a sum larger than the \$437,108 the event raised for charity. The bulk of the cost was a \$310,935 charge for city police to provide security. City officials said the cost was worth it, and pointed to a trade group's study that claimed the festival has a \$19 million positive economic impact on the area. Prior to 2004, the event was held at another location in San Joaquin County, and the county charged the festival organizers for its services – roughly \$150,000 in 2002, for example. The city lured the festival downtown by offering to provide police and other services at no cost to organizers – a deal the Stockton Record calls "a luxury most events are not afforded." (Source: Stockton Record, July 23.)

Region: C. Valley

Jurisdiction: City

Source: Stockton Record - July 23, 2007

Poetry

Dollar Amount: \$12,000

The Legislature's Republican leaders, Senator Jim Brulte and Assembly Member Dave Cox, wrote a poem to Governor Gray Davis on June 14, questioning the wisdom of the Resources Agency spending \$12,000 on a series of poetry readings. Agency Secretary Mary Nichols was quoted defending the event, because "poets give us the inspiration that we need to do our work." The Republicans concluded: "From the taxpayer you'll never hear, 'Isn't that rosy, coffee, camaraderie, and state-paid poesy.' Knowing this we ask (tongue-in-cheek, by golly!) that your administration never repeat this folly." (2001)

Region: Statewide

Jurisdiction: State

Source: June 14, 2001 poem by Dave Cox and Jim Brulte
