

IN OUR OPINION

FEBRUARY 1, 2007

It's their party! (and your bill)

It is disingenuous for Hudson County officials to cavort in Atlantic City at the November League of Municipalities Convention and then say they are doing something important to improve government when it is in fact just a big junket at the taxpayers' expense.

This annual play time has been going on for so many years that by now municipal governments should be running smoothly with all the knowledge supposedly learned at convention workshops. Instead, taxpayers continue to pay the freight for the luxury hotel rooms, tony restaurants and other activities frequented by their public servants. It is also a time when lobbyists, corporations and big campaign donors sponsor huge receptions on behalf of "key" elected officials.

Below are some of the interesting 2006 convention billing practices noted by The Jersey Journal in a three-part series by reporter Jarrett Renshaw.

- In some cases, attendees took husbands or wives with them to Atlantic City and charged taxpayers for their meals.
- North Bergen Mayor Nicholas Sacco spent \$368.67 in taxpayers' money per night for a reception room. Township officials said the room was used to conduct "city business," though no specifics were provided. The room was rented for four nights in a three-night convention.
- North Bergen taxpayers paid \$327 for Anthony Ferraro to attend the convention. He's not a township worker but rather the unpaid "driver" of Commissioner Theresa Ferraro.
- Hoboken parking czar John Corea submitted an expense voucher for a \$1,735.67 restaurant tab at the ritzy Borgata Hotel. He later withdrew the request. He feted people from the private firm that boots illegally parked cars.
- Jersey City Councilwoman Willie Flood had the city pay for lodging but accepted the \$165 per diem (total \$495) from the city's Redevelopment Agency, where she serves as a commissioner. The city pays after the receipts are submitted while the agency issues a check in advance.
- Hudson County and West New York both paid for Sal Vega, a freeholder and town commissioner. Vega's county hotel room was occupied by his aide because he lacks a credit card.

Perhaps officials should follow Union City's example of never approving any expenditures for the convention junket.