

CHRIS CHRISTIE WAS WORST US ATTORNEY FOR BIG SPENDING ON TRAVEL

DOJ's Inspector General just released a report on whether or not US Attorneys were living it up on the government dime. It finds that five of the US Attorneys studied were the worst offenders for staying at luxury hotels and billing the government. And though it doesn't refer to those US Attorneys by name, we know the one it calls the worst offender is Chris Christie, because one the trips discussed match the trips discussed when his exorbitant travel first focused attention on the issue of US Attorney travel.

Here's how the report describes Christie:

In terms of the percentage of travel, U.S. Attorney C was **the U.S. Attorney who most often exceeded the government rate without adequate justification**. The U.S. Attorney provided insufficient, inaccurate, or no justification for 14 of 23 trips (61 percent) that exceeded the government rate. [my emphasis]

In particular, here's a description of his travel to the Nine Zero hotel in Boston and the Four Seasons in DC.

For example, U.S. Attorney C traveled outside of his district to Boston, Massachusetts, for meetings with representatives of a defendant company at the Nine Zero Hotel. **U.S. Attorney C stayed at the Nine Zero Hotel at a cost of \$449 per night**, which was more than double the government rate of \$220 per night in Boston.¹⁶ U.S. Attorney C's secretary told us that it was a "coincidence" that these meetings were

at the same hotel where she had reserved a room for the U.S. Attorney.

In addition to his case-related travel, U.S. Attorney C also exceeded the government lodging rate when he traveled to Washington, D.C., to speak to an association. The U.S. Attorney stayed overnight at the Four Seasons Hotel, where he was scheduled to speak the following morning. **The hotel rate at the Four Seasons was \$475 per night**, more than double the government rate of \$233 per night. According to the justification memorandum, the U.S. Attorney stayed at the Four Seasons because his speech was scheduled at that hotel early in the morning.

16 U.S. Attorney C's reimbursements for airport transportation costs were also noteworthy. For example, rather than take a taxi from the Boston airport to the Nine Zero Hotel in downtown Boston, a trip of approximately 4 miles, he prearranged a car service to and from the Boston airport to the hotel, which cost the government \$236 round trip. In another example of excessive transportation costs, his car service from a London airport to his hotel in central London cost \$562 round trip. [my emphasis]

Here is TPM's description of the same trips.

On the high end, Christie spent nearly \$500 in taxpayer money on a night's stay in four star hotel in downtown Boston, claiming government rate rooms "weren't available." On the low end, Christie requested \$109 for a night in Warsaw, IN. The majority of the trips for which Christie formally requested to spend more than the government allows fall somewhere in between those two examples.

The Boston trip came on Oct. 16, 2007. Christie stayed one night at the **Nine Zero Hotel** downtown, which touts its ranking as one of *Travel And Leisure* magazine's 500 best hotels in the world. The room was \$449 per night, which Christie asked the Justice Department to pay because, according to the memo he submitted to the department's budget officer, "due to a high demand for rooms, the government rate is not available for my stay in Boston."

On Nov. 17, 2004, Christie made a trip to D.C. and stayed at the **Willard Intercontinental**, arguably the city's finest and most prestigious and unarguably among its most expensive. Again, he claimed it was the best deal he could find. "I was unable to locate lodging at the government rate," he wrote in a memo dated Nov. 22. "The only available lodging was at a rate of \$449.00 at the Willard hotel."

On another trip to D.C. on Oct. 15, 2008, Christie again went over budget limits to stay at a tony spot – this time, **the Four Seasons on Pennsylvania Ave.** The explanation for the overage is redacted in the memo obtained by TPMDC. [my emphasis]

As Christie continues to call for austerity in New Jersey, it's really worth pointing out what a big fan he is of billing taxpayers for his own luxury.