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# Mayor 'bans' Barack Obama from Las Vegas for sins against the city



Oscar Goodman, the Las Vegas Mayor, greets showgirls at a party celebrating his 70th birthday in July last year

Chris Ayres, Las Vegas

The list of people banned from Las Vegas is a litany of dishonour. But among the swindlers, fixers and mobsters — many of their mugshots displayed on the Nevada Gaming Commission's website under the heading Excluded, Wanted & Denied — is a new and rather unlikely name: that of Barack H. Obama, of Washington.

"I want to assure you that when he comes [here], I'll do everything I can to give him the boot," growled Oscar Goodman, the Mayor of Las Vegas, before Air Force One swooped down over Sin City's infamous "Strip" for a presidential visit that was expected to last less than 24 hours.

Mr Goodman was not there to greet Mr Obama when he stepped on to the tarmac of McCarran International, having turned down an invitation from the White House. Nor was he expected to attend any of the President's events — an astonishing rebuff by a lowly city mayor to a US leader.

With Obama's visit intended in large part to help the re-election chances of the deeply unpopular Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid — a man who opined with excruciating candour that the President's victory in 2008 was a result of him being a "light-skinned African-American, with no Negro dialect" — the mayor's snub was threatening to turn an already awkward situation into a full-blown political debacle.

But as of last night, Mr Goodman was undeterred. A rotund and unshaven former Mob lawyer, who is rarely pictured without a Martini glass in his hand, flanked by showgirls, the 70-year-old mayor is livid about what he regards as Mr Obama's repeated attacks on his beloved city, which has been hurt badly by the recession.

The first assault came last year, when Mr Obama lambasted corporate spending during the economic downturn, telling company bosses: "You can't get corporate jets. You can't go take that trip to Las Vegas."

Mr Goodman immediately demanded an apology, pointing out that Las Vegas now depends more on hosting business conferences than gambling, and therefore could be damaged by such an edict from the Oval Office. Last week Mr Obama did it again, remarking to a voter at a New Hampshire town hall meeting: "You don't blow a bunch of cash in Vegas when you're trying to save for college."

Mr Goodman hit the roof. "He [Obama] has a real psychological hang-up about the entertainment capital of the world," the mayor seethed at a press conference in his City Hall office, where he sits on a throne — literally — surrounded by an avalanche of kitsch, including a \$25,000 (£16,200) bottle of gin, a rhinestone-covered tricycle and a ballistic missile with his image on it.

"An apology won't be acceptable this time," the mayor went on. "When he hurt our economy with his ill-conceived rhetoric [last year], we didn't think it would happen again.

"Everyone says I shouldn't say it, but I gotta tell you — this President is a real ... slow . . . learner."

But while residents of Las Vegas are fond of their mayor, they're also used to taking his pronouncements — such as a recent suggestion that graffiti artists should have their thumbs amputated — with a large dose of salt.

Hundreds of Las Vegans ignored Mr Goodman's ban and lined up for free tickets to see Mr Obama host a town hall meeting, where he pointedly declined to offer any kind of apology.

He did, however, ask an Arkansas dentist in the audience if he was spending money while visiting Las Vegas. When the answer came back as yes, Mr Obama beamed and said: "That's good. We like to see that."

Indeed, despite his earlier assertion that Americans with financial obligations shouldn't "blow a bunch of cash in Vegas", even the President's supporters acknowledged some irony in the fact that Mr Obama's first event after landing in Sin City was a fundraiser for his party, where the 45 attendees were encouraged do exactly that.

### **Martini mayor who worked for the Mob**

? Oscar Goodman is a former criminal defence lawyer who made a fortune representing American mobsters

? Elected Mayor of Las Vegas in June 1999, and re-elected in 2003

? He is the only Las Vegas mayor to have his face printed on \$5 and \$25 chips spread across the city

? He has often played himself as the city's mayor in movies, including Angel Blade (2002), and Bachelor Party Vegas (2006)

? In the 1995 movie Casino, he played himself as a lawyer defending Nicky Santoro, a mobster. The Santoro character was played by Joe Pesci, and was based on a Mafia boss that Goodman had defended in real life

? In February 2007 Goodman gave a class on "How to make a Martini with the mayor" at a community college

? After President Obama was elected, Mr Goodman said: "I'm not a fan. I spent three minutes with him at the airport and maybe another five minutes later on. It was enough"

*Sources: Times archives, statemaster.com*

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