

# expensive

A federal investigation requested by U.S. Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nev., has found that slack oversight by the Department of Interior led to huge cost overruns for a new visitor center at Hoover Dam.

The report released July 28 by Interior's internal watchdog, the Office of Inspector General, refers to "weaknesses in the Bureau of Reclamation's construction man-

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agement process, including inadequate budget controls and inaccurate cost estimates." The Bureau of Reclamation is the agency within the Department of Interior overseeing Hoover Dam and its new visitor center.

"This report sheds light on the problem, but we need to go further," Reid said. "We have a responsibility to taxpayers to develop financial reporting procedures for federal agencies that will ensure accountability."

Reid is planning to conduct a congressional hearing before the Senate Interior Appropriations Subcommittee of which he is a member. Reid said Congress must take steps to prevent unchecked

spending by federal agencies in the future.

"The Appropriations Committee approved the center 10 years ago, but we were not apprised of major cost increases," Reid said. "The Committee needs to make sure that all funds allocated are accounted for and spent wisely."

The visitor center was originally slated to cost \$32 million. Latest completion estimates are nearer to \$130 million, according to the report. Included is a \$15 million parking lot, a \$16 million elevator and a 400-plus seat theater on an electric rotating platform.

Reid began investigating building costs for the center after meeting with residents of Overton,

Moapa and Logandale two years ago. Ratepayers were concerned about costs being passed along through their utility bills.

"I have no doubt the center will be good for Nevada tourism, but large overruns and a \$15 million parking lot raises questions about fiscal accountability," Reid said.

In September, Reid offered an amendment to an appropriations bill asking for a probe. The amendment passed and the Interior Department launched its internal investigation. In addition to slack oversight, the report faulted the Bureau of Reclamation for its negligence in notifying Congress of costly design changes to the center.