

Politics Federal

This was published 7 years ago

Taxpayers slugged for Peter Dutton's \$4000 dinner in the US

Adam Gartrell and Amy Remeikis

Updated January 12, 2017 – 2.56pm, first published at 1.41pm

Taxpayers picked up the bill for a \$4000 five star "working dinner" that included seven bottles of fine wine hosted by Immigration Minister Peter Dutton at a prestigious luxury hotel in Washington DC.

Mr Dutton and 10 guests – including his staff, former US officials and think tank personalities – enjoyed the \$360-a-head meal during his three-day visit to the US for high-level talks last February.

[Departmental documents released under Freedom of Information legislation](#) reveal Mr Dutton and his chief of staff Craig Maclachlan were given a budget of \$2000 for meals and incidentals for their visit.

But their February 17 three-course dinner alone cost almost double that, at \$US2790, which was \$3929 at that day's exchange rate.



Peter Dutton's biggest advantage is that the government have no other choice right now. ALEX ELLINGHAUSEN

While Mr Dutton was staying at the Westin Hotel, the dinner was held at the nearby Jefferson Hotel – billed as the city's "most discerning hotel" and "second most prestigious address" after the White House.

Mr Dutton and his guests enjoyed two bottles of Far Niente chardonnay at \$US80 a pop, three bottles of Chappellet cabernet sauvignon Mountain Cuvee at \$US75 each and two bottles of Mark Ryan cabernet sauvignon blend at \$US68 each, [according to information released in response to a question by Labor senator Catryna Bilyk](#).

While the department did not provide information on the food served, the restaurant offers such dishes as beeswax poached king salmon, lobster gratin, pan-seared muscovy duck breast and seared venison loin. For dessert the restaurant offers Ethiopian arabica tropilia mousse and wildflower honey-poached pear.

The Jefferson's "discreet and elegant" Michelin-rated restaurant offers seasonal fine-dining and an extensive 1300-label wine list. The menu is "inspired by the harvest from Thomas Jefferson's kitchen gardens at Monticello".



The historic Jefferson Hotel, where Immigration Minister Peter Dutton had a five-star working dinner with Department of Immigration staff while in the US. VIRGINIA TOURIST BOARD

"Providing the final flourish to this unforgettable upscale dining experience is service as discreet as it is attentive, and always informed," the hotel says on its website.

A few days after the dinner the restaurant asked its Facebook followers to vote for it as DC's "Best Restaurant When Someone Else Is Paying".



No negotiations: Michael Pezzullo, secretary of the Department of Immigration and Border Protection.
ALEX ELLINGHAUSEN

A spokesperson for Mr Dutton said the dinner – on the sidelines of the Five Countries Ministerial Meeting – was organised by the department.

"The minister [also] held bilateral meetings with US Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson and now UK Prime Minister Theresa May, visited the White House and the Director of the CIA and the minister was also negotiating the arrangement with the United States to accept people from Nauru and Manus Island," she said.

Included among the guests at the dinner were former acting commissioner of the US Customs and Border Protection Thomas Winkowski, former homeland security secretary Tom Ridge, Alex Nowrasteh of the right-leaning Cato Institute and a number of other migration experts.

Mr Dutton charged taxpayers \$36,682 for the trip all up, including \$27,800 for business class return airfares.

Immigration Department secretary Mike Pezzullo was also on the trip, with FOI documents showing he had a separate budget of \$17,000.

Mr Dutton and Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull announced their refugee deal with the US late last year but it's [now in doubt](#) with just a week until the anti-immigration Donald Trump officially takes office.

[Follow us on Twitter](#)