Senator Tom Coburn Calls International AIDS Conference a Waste of Money

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In a February 19 letter to the president of the International AIDS Society, Senator Tom Coburn (R–Oklahoma) said the upcoming International AIDS Conference in Vienna should be canceled, suggesting that its funds be used for HIV treatment and research instead, *The Washington Times* reports.

“While I recognize the International AIDS Conference can provide a unique forum for networking, reviewing scientific developments and sharing information for many stakeholders, modern technology allows us to accomplish these goals for relatively little cost,” Coburn wrote. “While these alternatives may not include the museum and castle tours, the visit to Mozart’s birth place, or wine tasting offered by the upcoming gathering in Vienna, they can meet the main goals of the conference.”

According to a report by Coburn’s office, it cost hundreds of thousands of dollars to send more than 100 federal employees to the 2008 conference in Mexico City.

Julio Montaner, MD, president of the International AIDS Society, defended the meetings in a letter to Coburn.

He wrote: “My colleagues and I firmly believe that it would be foolhardy in the midst of such significant investments to not take the opportunity every two years to assess progress to date, generate new ideas and strategies and chart a collective course forward.”

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