

Comptroller General
of the United States
Washington, D.C. 20548

modifies

*XB-236110, Jan. 26, 1990;
XB-199526, Feb. 23, 1981;
XB-166141, Feb. 27, 1969; and
XB-129612, July 1, 1957.*

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CP

Decision

Matter of: Danny H. Breuninger - Travel Allowances -
Attending Funeral as Agency Representative

File: B-239887

Date: January 25, 1991

DIGEST

Attendance at a funeral is not normally considered official business for which an agency may pay an employee's travel expenses. However, where the head of the agency or his delegatee determines that there are circumstances relating to significant activities of the agency that justify the designation of an employee as an official agency representative to attend a funeral, the employee may be reimbursed travel expenses from agency funds. B-236110, Jan. 26, 1990; B-199526, Feb. 23, 1981; B-166141, Feb. 27, 1969; and B-129612, July 1, 1957, are modified.

DECISION

BACKGROUND

A certifying officer for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, ✓ Department of the Interior, ✓ requests an advance decision whether Mr. Danny H. Breuninger, an employee of the Bureau, may be reimbursed for travel expenses incurred in attending the funeral service of a Bureau police officer who was killed in the line of duty. Mr. Breuninger, Director of the Indian Police Academy, was selected as the representative of the Bureau and he was authorized official travel for this purpose from Tucson, Arizona, to Lame Deer, Montana, and return. His travel authorization was signed by the Acting Deputy to the Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs (Trust Services). The question arises because of prior decisions of the Comptroller General denying travel expense reimbursement to employees for attending a funeral.

PUBLISHED DECISION

70 Comp. Gen. 200

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

Federal agencies may only authorize travel at government expense which is for official business essential to the purposes of the government and for accomplishment of the agency's mission. Federal Travel Regulations, paras. 1-1.3(b), 1-1.4(a) (Supp. 9, Feb. 29, 1984), incorp. by ref., 41 C.F.R. § 101-7.003 (1989). We have long held that attending the funeral of a fellow employee is not normally considered official business within the meaning of the travel laws and regulations, and thus, an agency may not reimburse its employees for expenses incurred to attend the funeral. B-236110, Jan. 26, 1990; B-166141, Feb. 27, 1969; and B-129612, July 1, 1957. See also, Donnie W. Daniels, B-199526, Feb. 23, 1981, denying travel allowances to attend the funeral of a fellow employee's son.

We think the situation in this case justifies a different conclusion. There are situations where the attendance by an official agency representative at a funeral may be considered important to the mission of the agency and where an appropriate representative would be unable to attend without the travel being authorized at government expense. The agency head or delegatee, in his or her discretion, may consider that an agency representative at a funeral would serve the governmental purposes of sustaining employee morale and reinforcing to the agency's employees and others the significance of the deceased to the agency. We would expect, however, that before an employee is authorized to travel to a funeral as the official agency representative, the matter would be reviewed and the authorization made at an appropriate level of the agency. In such a case we would not object to the agency authorizing and paying for the travel as being for official business.^{1/}

In B-236110, Jan. 26, 1990, supra, our most recent decision holding that reimbursement of travel expenses to a fellow employee's funeral was not authorized, a Drug Enforcement Administration agent was killed in the line of duty and a field division official of the agency authorized travel of 17 employees to the funeral. In addition to the large number of employees involved, the employees were not designated as agency representatives at an appropriate level of the agency and the authorization to travel to the funeral at agency expense was contrary to agency policy and regulation.

Donnie W. Daniels, B-199526, supra, involved an employee's travel to the funeral of the son of an agency employee;

^{1/} Compare 55 Comp. Gen. 1333 (1976), concerning employees' travel to receive non-federally sponsored honor awards.

B-166141, ^{*}supra, involved an employee's travel to the funeral of a former agency employee; and B-129612, ^{*}July 1, 1957, supra, concerned an agency's payment of the expenses of five employees to travel to a funeral. It is not clear whether the circumstances involved in any of these cases were such that payment would be proper had the travel been authorized at an appropriate level in the agency in order to insure appropriate official representation at a funeral. In any event, to the extent that these decisions conflict with today's holding, they are modified.

In the present case the circumstances justify the designation of an agency representative to attend the funeral. Accordingly, since Mr. Breuninger's travel as agency representative appears to have been properly authorized, we have no objection to reimbursement of his authorized travel expenses.

Milton J. Fowler

for Comptroller General
of the United States

Civilian Personnel
Travel
Travel expenses
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Official business
Determination

Civilian Personnel
Travel
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Applicability