

**DECISION**



**THE COMPTROLLER GENERAL  
OF THE UNITED STATES**  
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20548

30689

DATE: MAY 20 1975 97288

FILE: B-182629

MATTER OF: Expenditure for key chains for educators attending Forest Service seminars

DIGEST: Voucher covering cost of decorative key chains given to educators attending Forest Service-sponsored seminars, with intent that Sawtooth National Recreation Area and FS symbols on key chains would generate future responses from participants and depict positive association between SNRA and FS, may not be certified for payment, since such items are in nature of personal gifts and, thus, expenditure therefor would not constitute necessary and proper use of appropriated funds. See 53 Comp. Gen. 770 (1974); and B-151688, December 5, 1963.

A certifying officer of the Forest Service, Department of Agriculture, has requested our opinion as to the propriety of certifying for payment a voucher in favor of Graphic Services & Supply Co., in the sum of \$168.75, covering the cost of 225 specially made key chains which were distributed to educators attending one of two Forest Service-sponsored seminars held in July and August 1974.

In his letter the certifying officer states, in part, that:

"The 1974 seminars illustrated to these influential college and university educators and administrators the programs of the National Forests and the National Recreation Areas including management practices and research activities. The educators and Forest Service management people discussed several regional and national issues. The Forest Service gained from the educators their viewpoints, advice, and experience.

"The Forest Service gave a key chain depicting the Forest Service and the National Recreation Area symbols to each participant with maps, pictures, and other printed information relative to the tour. \* \* \*."

The records disclose that reasons for giving the key chains to the educators as follows:

"The token key chains presented to participants of the 1974 Educators Tour were an important part of a total environmental educators package designed to stimulate advice and council from these highly qualified individuals regarding the management direction being pursued by the Forest Service in the Sawtooth National Recreation Area. These key chains, depicting the SNRA and FS symbols, will psychologically trigger future responses because they will be used and serve as a constant reminder of our request for each individual's expert assistance. The symbology also depicts a positive association of the SNRA as a part of the Forest Service."

The appropriation (Pub. L. No. 93-120, October 4, 1973, 87 Stat. 429, 440-441) proposed to be charged with payment for the items in question is available for "\* \* \* expenses necessary for forest protection and utilization \* \* \*." Since the appropriation is not specifically available for giving key chains to individuals, in order to qualify as a legitimate expenditure it must be demonstrated that the acquisition and distribution of such items constituted a necessary expense of the Forest Service.

We have previously held that an expenditure by the Small Business Administration (SBA) for the distribution of decorative ashtrays to Federal officials at an SBA-sponsored conference, with the intent that the SBA seal and lettering on the ashtrays would generate conversation relative to the conference and serve as a continuing reminder to the officials of the purposes of the conference, thereby furthering SBA objectives, was unauthorized. We held that those items were in the nature of personal gifts, and, therefore, the expenditure did not constitute a necessary and proper use of appropriated funds. See 53 Comp. Gen. 770 (1974). Similarly, we have held that appropriated funds could not be used to purchase and distribute cuff links and bracelets as promotional items under the International Travel Act of 1961, since such items were more properly in the category of personal gifts rather than promotional material and, thus, did not constitute a necessary and proper use of funds appropriated to carry out that act. See B-151688, December 5, 1963.

As the certifying officer points out, it is true that in 17 Comp. Gen. 674 (1938), we held that an appropriation item for "Vehicle Service" made by the Post Office Appropriation Act for 1938 for "accident prevention" was available to purchase medals and insignia for awards to Government mail truck operators for careful driving. We noted in that

decision that appropriations in general terms are not available for purchase of medals, trophies, insignia, etc., in the absence of specific statutory authority therefor. However, it was recognized therein that the award of some form of merit for safe driving was widely considered to be effective in encouraging safe operation of motor vehicles. Hence, we felt that the use of that appropriation to implement an administrative determination to issue such awards would be appropriate in those circumstances to achieve the "accident prevention" referred to in the Act. Thus, that case is distinguishable from the aforementioned decisions and the present case.

With respect to the instant situation the Congress has recognized that the total forestry research efforts of the State colleges and universities and of the Federal Government will be more effective if there is close cooperation between such programs. The Secretary of Agriculture was authorized to cooperate with the several States by providing financial assistance to qualified State institutions of higher learning. Pub. L. No. 87-788, October 10, 1962, 76 Stat. 806, 16 U.S.C. § 582a (1970). Other legislatively authorized programs also seek to foster cooperation between the Secretary and the States and other public and private agencies and individuals. However, we do not feel that the Congress, in encouraging cooperation, intended that funds appropriated to the Forest Service could properly be used to purchase personal gifts. In other words, we regard the key chains in the present case, as being in the nature of personal gifts from the Forest Service to the educators, and, therefore, in the absence of statutory authority therefor, they do not constitute a necessary and proper use of appropriated funds.

Hence, the voucher in question, which is retained here, may not be certified for payment.

R.F. KELLER

Deputy - Comptroller General  
of the United States