

Mr. Golden T  
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**DECISION**



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

*[Request For Exemption From Restrictions Against Use of Travel Agents]*

FILE: B-199897

DATE: August 26, 1980

MATTER OF: Department of Interior - use of travel agent  
by traveler on official Government travel

**DIGEST:**

Where traveler whose transportation is reimbursable by Department of Interior is unaware of regulations which generally preclude use of travel agents, and purchases airline tickets from travel agency with personal funds, GAO will allow reimbursement for the cost of the coach tickets purchased.

① The Chief, Branch of Finance, Office of Secretarial Operations-Fiscal of the Department of Interior (Interior requests an exemption from our restrictions against the use of travel agents to procure official Government travel, see 4 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 52.3 (1980), for a traveler whose cost of travel is to be reimbursed by Interior. The purpose of the exemption is to permit reimbursement for round trip air fare purchased from travel agents with personal funds. AGC 00033

The travel involved transportation for meetings at Interior in Washington, D.C. Interior's submission indicates that both the traveler and the administrative personnel involved were unaware of the requirement restricting the use of travel agents and that subsequently all travelers and administrative personnel were advised of the restriction. Interior believes that equity and fairness dictate that an exemption should be authorized since the Government received the benefit of the transportation at coach rates.

In two recent decisions to Interior based on similar facts we granted the relief requested here. B-198950, July 18, 1980; B-198301, May 1, 1980, 59 Comp. Gen. (copies enclosed).

In these decisions, we stated that where a traveler whose transportation was reimbursable by Interior was unaware of the regulation precluding the use of travel agents, and purchased an airline ticket with personal funds, we would allow reimbursement in an amount not

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exceeding the cost of the transportation had the tickets been purchased directly from the carrier. B-198950, supra; B-198301, supra. Here the tickets purchased were coach class tickets which are usually the lowest cost ticket available. Therefore, if the voucher is otherwise proper, we will not object to payment of the cost of the airline ticket for coach fare under these circumstances.

The vouchers and supporting papers accompanying your request are returned.

*Harry R. Van Cleave*

For The Comptroller General  
of the United States