



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

147129

Decision

Matter of: Department of Agriculture--Purchase of Business Cards

File: B-246616

Date: July 17, 1992

DIGEST

The United States Department of Agriculture may not use appropriated funds to purchase business cards. The costs of business cards may not be paid with government funds without specific statutory authority to do so.

DECISION

The Acting Director, Office of Operations, United States Department of Agriculture, has asked us to reconsider our position on the use of appropriated funds to purchase business cards for government employees. As discussed below, we remain of the view that business cards may not be purchased with appropriated funds without specific statutory authority to do so.

BACKGROUND

The Acting Director points out that employees, particularly contracting officers, at the Department of Agriculture need to make the extent of their authority readily available to the public. She explains that the "business card is the most practical, economical, commonly recognized, and business-like way to provide that information." As such, she argues that the agency's operating appropriation should be available to purchase business cards since the use of such cards enhances the accomplishment of the agency's mission.

DISCUSSION

By law, all printing for government entities must be done at the Government Printing Office (44 U.S.C. § 501), and no item may be printed unless authorized by law (44 U.S.C. § 1102(a)). In implementing these statutes, the Congressional Joint Committee on Printing has issued the Government Printing and Binding Regulations. Section 20 of these regulations provides:

"Printing or engraving of calling or greeting cards is considered to be personal rather than official and shall not be done at government

expense," S. Pub. No. 5, 100th Cong., 1st Sess., 15 (1987).

We have long held that the costs of calling or business cards are personal rather than official expenses of the persons using them. Therefore these costs may not be paid with government funds without specific statutory authority to do so. See, e.g., B-131611, Feb. 15, 1968; 12 Comp. Gen. 565 (1933). We have continued to apply this rule even when the cards were clearly being used only for official purposes. See B-195036, July 11, 1979; 12 Comp. Gen. 565, 566 (1933).

We have frequently considered arguments similar to those presented by the Acting Director here, but have consistently ruled that appropriated funds are not available for these cards. See 68 Comp. Gen. 467, 468-69 (1989) and cases cited therein. The arguments made by the Acting Director are no more persuasive than the ones we have rejected in the past. Accordingly, we remain of the view that the Department of Agriculture may not use appropriated funds to purchase business cards.¹

William J. Dorsey
for Comptroller General
of the United States

¹As we stated in B-223678, June 5, 1989, such specific statutory authority is provided by a line-item agency appropriation for official reception and representation expenses. Business cards are a legitimate and accepted "representation" device, and an agency would be within its discretion to determine that their use would materially contribute to fulfilling the objectives of its reception and representation appropriation. A determination by the Department of Agriculture to use reception and representation funds to purchase business cards for staff members whose jobs include representation of the agency would be authorized under such an appropriation. Of course, the Department should seek guidance as to the intended scope of section 20 of the Government Printing and Binding Regulations from the Joint Committee on Printing before making such an expenditure.