

B-248991.2

January 4, 1994

Ms.
Certifying Officer
U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Mines
P.O. Box 25086
Building 20, Denver Federal Center
Denver, Colorado 80225

Dear Ms. :

This responds to your June 3, 1993 letter concerning the certification of payments for airline tickets used by the former Director of the U.S. Bureau of Mines,

Your letter states that Mr. performed 127 business trips for the Bureau of Mines during the period of March 1988 to December 1992, but only filed 89 detailed travel vouchers for out-of-pocket expenses. On 29 trips, his airline tickets were obtained from the travel management center and charged to the Diners Club centrally billed account. The agency's finance and paying office paid the airline ticket expenses based on Mr. unlimited open authorization to travel for any purpose during this period. Mr. did not detail the specific purpose of each trip on a trip-by-trip basis in advance of travel.

Your letter further notes that when Mr. did not submit travel vouchers for the 29 trips at issue, the Division of Finance prepared a blanket travel voucher with a list of all airline tickets paid for him and the dates and destinations for each trip, and asked Mr. to certify that the airline tickets were used for official business. Mr. submitted a certification which stated that all airline tickets charged to the Corporate Diners Club card were for official business.

You question whether the fact that the traveler has not submitted a travel voucher for out-of-pocket expenses incurred makes the payment of the airline tickets improper and, if so, how long should the disbursing office wait for a travel voucher to be submitted before billing the traveler?

At the outset, we note that Mr. failure to submit travel vouchers for out-of-pocket travel expenses does not

make payment of the airline tickets improper. The Federal Travel Regulation governing centrally billed accounts does provide that, in order to be reimbursed upon completing official travel, the employee must submit a travel voucher to the finance and paying office. 41 C.F.R. § 301-15.45(d)(1). We are not aware, however, of any statute or regulation which would require a traveler to submit travel vouchers for out-of-pocket travel expenses if the traveler chooses not to seek reimbursement.

Subsequent to your letter, you indicated that Mr. responded to a Bureau request that he certify a blanket voucher that provides information on the purpose of each of the 29 trips for which airline tickets were charged to the Diners Club centrally billed account. This certification of travel purposes is consistent with the Federal Travel Regulation, which requires that each travel voucher shall specify clearly the purpose of each trip performed by the traveler. See 41 C.F.R. § 301-1.102(c); 41 C.F.R. § 301-11.5(g).

Background material submitted with your letter and the certification furnished by Mr. indicate that there are open questions about whether some of the trips for which airline tickets were charged to the centrally billed account were "mixed" trips which included both official and political events. These questions should be resolved, since political travel expenses are to be reimbursed from other than appropriated funds. 6 Op. Off. Legal Counsel 214 (1982). The government's travel policy provides that agencies may authorize only that travel which is necessary to accomplish the purposes of the government effectively and economically, and may reimburse only those expenses essential to transacting official business. 41 C.F.R. § 301-1.101(a); 41 C.F.R. § 301-1.3(b). With respect to centrally billed accounts, the Federal Travel Regulation further provides that the government is liable only for authorized charges incurred in conjunction with official travel. 41 C.F.R. § 301-15.45(e).

If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact Ms. _____ of my staff on .

Sincerely yours,

Lynn H. Gibson
Associate General Counsel

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DIGEST

An employee who traveled on official business but failed to submit travel vouchers for lodgings, meals, and other out-of-pocket expenses should not be charged for airline tickets charged to the agency's centrally billed account. The employee certified that the trips were for official business, and the only issue to be resolved is whether two trips involved both official and political events, for which the government is only liable for a portion of the travel expenses.