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

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FPC-96-1-24

AUG 28 1979

The Honorable Jack Brooks
Chairman, Committee on Government
Operations
House of Representatives

HSE 01500

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Your letter of June 22, 1979, requested our comments on H.R. 4520, which would amend section 5728 of title 5, United States Code, to extend travel and transportation expenses for vacation leave before a new tour of duty to certain Federal employees whose places of residence are outside the continental United States.

The existing section 5728 requires periodic vacation leave travel for employees on duty outside the continental United States. There is no limit on the number of times employees may receive this benefit. H.R. 4520 would extend this benefit to employees who are residents of Alaska, Hawaii and other outlying U.S. areas and who are on duty outside their area of residence.

On March 2, 1977, we issued the enclosed report, "Special Travel Benefits for Federal Employees in Hawaii, Alaska, and Similar Areas Outside the Continental U.S. Should Be Changed" which addressed the vacation leave program as it pertains to U.S. areas outside the conterminous forty-eight States. We concluded that the 1954 law requiring these trips had outlived its usefulness because returning employees to their former homes every two or three years was no longer a necessary recruiting and retention incentive in most cases. Most areas are no longer isolated or arduous, and many employees have made them their permanent homes. Also, these trips are largely viewed as unearned perquisites, particularly by employees who are hired locally and receive no similar benefit.

The essential need is that Government agencies be given flexibility to determine the few instances in which vacation travel may still be required for recruiting and retention, such as at isolated posts in Alaska.

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We believe that the whole vacation travel program should be updated and substantially reduced. Accordingly, we oppose enactment of H.R. 4520 because it would extend entitlements to additional employees with little if any recruiting or retention benefit to the Government in return.

Sincerely yours,

John D. Heller

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Comptroller General
of the United States

Enclosure