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COMPTROLLER GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20540

B-179514

JAN 29 1974

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CI The Honorable Patricia Schroeder
House of Representatives

Dear Mrs. Schroeder:

Pursuant to your letters of August 14 and 30, 1973, we have examined into questions raised by two of your constituents concerning travel to Alaska by personnel of the National Field Investigations Center (NFIC), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Denver, Colorado. 2/11/31

R During August 1973, EPA's Inspection Branch was investigating this matter in response to a request from a United States Senator. To avoid duplication of effort, we awaited completion of the Inspection Branch report before making our review. We interviewed your two constituents, NFIC directorate personnel, and other staff members and reviewed the Inspection Branch report and NFIC records related to travel and planning of assignments.

Both of your constituents raised questions about travel to Alaska by the Assistant Director for Planning and Management and about the number of trips taken by other top management personnel. One claimed that the Assistant Director routed his trip through Hawaii at Government expense, and the other said that work required of NFIC personnel at Yuma, Arizona, and Scottsbluff, Nebraska, deserved higher priority than that in Alaska.

Neither constituent is presently employed by EPA. One was a temporary employee hired for 1 year and the other obtained a higher paying job elsewhere. They both advised us that they were assigned to the Chemistry Branch of NFIC, they did not travel to Alaska, and their comments to you were based on hearsay.

The Inspection Branch's investigation disclosed no irregularities or inordinate expenses, and our review confirmed these findings. The travel by top NFIC personnel to Alaska and the work in Arizona and Nebraska is discussed below.

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EPA's region X Surveillance and Analysis Division at Seattle, whose area of responsibility includes Alaska, requested NFIC assistance in conducting a seafood processors survey in Alaska. The survey was conducted in accordance with detailed plans, including the locations to be visited, worked out between NFIC and region X. The Alaska travel by NFIC personnel, which cost approximately \$29,000, involved 16 men who made a total of 22 trips from March through August 1973. The top five NFIC personnel made a total of eight trips.

In March 1973, the Director, NFIC, and the Assistant Director for Technical Programs visited region X's field office in Anchorage, Alaska, to set forth definite objectives for the survey and to discuss approaches to the projected field investigations. In July 1973, the Assistant Director for Technical Programs visited Anchorage, Homer, and Kenai, Alaska. During August 1973, the Director visited Ketchikan, Petersburg, and Juneau, Alaska. The Director said that these trips were made for managerial overview and to obtain knowledge concerning seafood canning and waste disposal processes in order to discuss and, if necessary defend EPA's data.

The Chief of the Biology Branch, NFIC, also made two trips to Alaska. Substituting for a biologist who contracted mononucleosis, the Chief made his first trip in June 1973 to obtain samples before the processing season began. His second trip was in July to relieve a biologist who had been in travel status in Alaska since June. His travel included Anchorage, Chignik, False Pass, King Cove, Sand Point, Cold Bay, and Squaw Harbor from July 15 through August 1.

On his second trip, the Chief went via Hawaii. He took annual leave for the period preceding his scheduled arrival in Alaska and had it stipulated in his travel authorization. He purchased a separate round-trip fare for his wife to accompany him to Honolulu and paid the increase in his fare to be able to delay one week in Hawaii enroute. His travel voucher reflected constructive travel costs based on departing Denver on July 15, the date he could have departed to arrive at Anchorage on that date. The Government incurred no additional expense for this travel.

The Chief of the Field Operations Branch, NFIC, made a supervisory visit to Alaska in July 1973. His travel included stops at Anchorage, King Salmon, Chignik, Cold Bay, False Pass, King Cove, Sand Point, and Squaw Harbor.

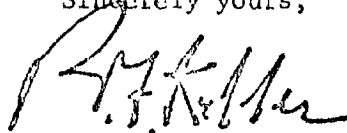
The NFIC Director told the Assistant Director for Planning and Management, NFIC, to assist in the Alaska field survey so that he could evaluate the Field Operations Branch activities from a planning standpoint. He joined a region X representative and an NFIC engineer in Juneau on August 4 and participated with them on in-plant surveys.

at eight canneries: two at Hoonah, one at Chatham, three at Petersburg, one at Annette Island, and one at Ketchikan. He also visited with management personnel of three canneries at Ketchikan and one at Petersburg and visited the temporary NFIC laboratory at Juneau before returning to Denver on August 17. His trip was not routed through Hawaii as claimed by one of your constituents. On August 23, he submitted a report of his activities to the Director which included three recommendations for improving field surveys.

One of your constituents suggested that work required of NFIC personnel at Yuma, Arizona, and Scottsbluff, Nebraska, deserved higher priority than the work in Alaska. Internal operating reports prepared by NFIC during the period of the Alaska survey showed that work connected with pesticide investigations was being done in the Lower Colorado River Basin area--near Yuma--and that field investigations of sugar beet processing were planned for the North Platte River area--near Scottsbluff. The Chief of the Chemistry Branch said that the Alaska survey was scheduled to coincide with the seafood-processing season, the survey of the Lower Colorado River was scheduled in the summer (July to September) to coincide with the application of pesticides, and the survey of sugar beet wastes was scheduled to coincide with the sugar-beet-processing season in December 1973.

We do not plan to distribute this report further unless you agree or publicly announce its contents.

Sincerely yours,



Deputy } Comptroller General
of the United States

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