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Allocation of Funds for Entertainment of Officials From American Republics

Number: B-20085

Date: 1941-09-10

B-20085 September 10, 1941

Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, Commerce Department Building.

My dear Mr. Rocksfeller:

I have your letter of August 26, 1941, as follows:

"In carrying out the program of this Office to 'further the national defense and strengthen the bonds between the nations of the Western Hemisphere's from time it is necessary for us to entertain officials and citizens from the other American Republics. The appropriation for the Office for Emergency Management in the Act of July 3, 1941, Public No. 150, 77th Congress, provides, inter alia, that the funds allocated to this Office shall be available for 'entertainment of officials and others of other American republics.'

"In this connection, I desire to submit for your consideration the question of what items of entertainment may properly be paid for from such appropriation. For example, it has been and will be necessary for us to give cocktail parties for visiting dignitaries, give banquets and dinners, purchase theater tickets, arrange sight-seeing parties, and render other courtesies similar to those afforded to representatives of this country in the other American Republics. It is the opinion of my General Counsel that the language in the appropriation act is sufficiently board to cover these items, but he has advised me that the question should be referred to you for determination."

Where an appropriation expressly provides in general terms for entertainment of officials and others, as is the situation here, the selection of form of entertainment must of necessity rest largely within the sound discretion of the administrative officer concerned. The term "entertainment" has been variously defined in Words & Phrases, Permanent Edition, Vol. 14, as: "a source or means of amusement"; "that which serves for amusement, and 'amusement' is defined as a pleasurable occupation of the senses"; "a hospitable repast"; and "A 'banquet' is said to be a grand entertainment of eating and drinking; a sumptuous feast." Bouvier's Law Dictionary defines the word as "Something connected with the enjoyment of refreshment rooms, tables, and the like. It is something beyond refreshments; it is the accommodation provided whether that includes musical or other amusements or not." In considering a similar question Judge Tracewell, former Comptroller of the Treasury, in 14 Comp. Dec. 344, at page 346, said: "Entertainments * * * without wines, liquors or cigars, would be like the play of Hamlet with the melancholy Dane entirely left out of the lines."

This office may not, of course, undertake to set forth all items of

entertainment which properly may be paid for under the appropriation referred to but, generally, it may be stated that items such as those set forth in the example given in your letter appear to come within the generally accepted meaning of the word "entertainment" as above defined and as used in the appropriation act.

Respectfully,

(Signed) R. N. ELLIE Acting Comptroller General of the United States