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

B-39772

May 8, 1979

A.

The Honorable Abraham Ribicoff
Chairman, Committee on Governmental
   Affairs
United States Senate

Dear Mr. Chairman:

[Comments on] Your letter of March 30, 1979, requested our views and recommendations on S. 697, 96th Congress, a bill "To reduce by $500,000,000 the amount which may be obligated for travel and transportation of officers and employees in the executive branch during fiscal year 1980."

   The bill specifies that the reduction applies to travel and transportation of persons as well as transportation of things for officers and employees of the executive branch. This is roughly equivalent to budget object classifications 21 and 22 which are about $7.9 billion in the requested budget. A $500 million reduction would be about 6 percent of that amount. Properly managed, a reduction of this size should not have a significant effect on essential Government operations.

   You may recall that in 1974 the Congress required a Government-wide, across-the-board reduction of travel 10 percent below the prior year's level. Section 205, Public Law 93-554, 88 Stat. 1784, December 27, 1974. That flat percentage reduction was repealed soon thereafter (Section 101, Public Law 94-6, 89 Stat. 12, February 28, 1975). Because of the inflexibility of the flat reduction, essential functions such as safety, inspection, and audit detection were being restricted in addition to other less essential functions. S.697 would alleviate that problem because it authorizes the Office of Management and Budget to allocate the reduction among the departments, agencies and instrumentalities of the executive branch. This discretion is important because there might be a serious impact on the mission of some agencies with even a small cut-back, while others may be able to absorb a large reduction with no serious consequences. Accordingly, we have no objection to this bill.

Sincerely yours,

Comptroller General
of the United States

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