



(NOVEMBER 9, 2011)

In order to further improve the lines of communication and to respond to the concerns between the National VA Council and you our members, I have established a National VA Council Briefing. This NVAC Briefing will bring you the latest news and developments within DVA and provide you with the current status of issues this Council is currently addressing. I believe that this NVAC Briefing will greatly enhance the way in which we communicate and the way in which we share new information, keeping you better informed.

Alma L. Lee

National VA Council, President

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**In This Briefing: Obama orders agency spending cuts on travel, technology and swag**

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By [Ed O'Keefe](#)

The Washington Post

Updated and Corrected 7:10 a.m. ET

President Obama is ordering steep spending cuts that will mean less travel for federal employees and strict limitations on government-issued computers, printers, vehicles — and even office swag.

The White House said Obama will sign an executive order Wednesday requiring federal agencies to make 20 percent spending cuts on travel, equipment and technology, a move that should save billions of dollars annually, according to a senior administration official familiar with the plans.

Wednesday's order is another step in the White House's goal of identifying [bite-sized initiatives](#) that don't require congressional approval and demonstrate unilateral actions taken by Obama to jumpstart the economy and curtail federal spending. It is also part of the administration's ongoing [Campaign to Cut Waste](#) launched over the

summer during the contentious debt negotiations to demonstrate the administration's willingness to make spending cuts.

Once enacted, agencies and federal workers should expect significant changes to day-to-day operations — perhaps best demonstrated by a meeting held Tuesday in downtown Washington.

The [Chief Human Capital Officers Council](#) — a group comprised of the federal government's top human resources officials — held their annual public meeting at [conference space owned and operated](#) by the [American Institute of Architects](#) in a building across the street from the [Federal Reserve](#) and [Interior Department](#) and two blocks in either direction from the [Office of Personnel Management](#) and the [Office of Management and Budget](#) — all federally-owned buildings with rooms that could conceivably accommodate public meetings.

After Tuesday's meeting, a reporter spotted at least four government-owned vehicles idling outside AIA headquarters with drivers ready to transport officials attending the meeting back to their offices. Among the officials spotted getting into a government-owned vehicle was OPM Director John Berry, whose office is just two blocks from the meeting site.

According to a White House release announcing Obama's new orders, agencies will be instructed to limit official travel to circumstances where an activity can only be performed away from an employee's primary office, such as diplomatic missions or enforcement inspections. Employees will be permitted to attend local meetings or conferences in person — meaning CHCO Council members could still meet in person in Washington — but agencies will be urged to use federally-owned or controlled conference space for future meetings.

The executive order is also placing strict limitations on the transportation of top administration officials around Washington. Federal agencies spent about \$9 million annually shuttling top officials around the District, according to the White House. In the future, the new orders might require CHCO Council members to make their own transportation arrangements instead of relying on a federally-owned vehicle .

Obama's orders also will require agencies to disconnect unused wireless service contracts and to end the practice of giving some federal employees access to multiple computers, laptops or phones. The [Department of Homeland Security](#) is planning to cut \$10.5 million by conducting annual audits to track for unused cellphones and air cards and the [Commerce Department](#) plans to save \$3 million this fiscal year by disconnecting 2,648 wireless lines that have been inactive for three months, the White House said.

And in a blow to the gift industry, Obama is ordering the end of government-issued swag, or items purchased to promote an agency's initiatives or to bolster internal office morale. The move likely means agencies will no longer distribute coffee mugs, tote bags, t-shirts and other equipment emblazoned with its logo to employees or the general public.

But the order does not effect the production of FBI or FEMA windbreakers and hats needed as part of an employee's uniform and will still permit agencies to conduct programs similar to [the "I Believe in HUD" campaign launched in March](#) that allows [Department of Housing and Urban Development](#) to purchase baby bibs, trucker hats, license plate frames and wall clocks with the HUD logo.

Also Wednesday, the White House is set to announce this year's finalists for the third annual [SAVE Award](#), a government-wide contest seeking cost-cutting ideas submitted by federal employees. Each year's winner earns an Oval Office meeting with Obama and has their idea incorporated into future federal budget proposals.

The White House said this year's finalists include a [NASA](#) employee from Maryland who suggested establishing an agency "lending library" to avoid duplicative purchases of expensive tools; a HUD employee from Colorado, who suggested ending annual visits to inspect superior-rated properties; a [Treasury Department](#) employee from the District, who suggested that the department stop purchasing printed copies of the U.S. Code; and a [Social Security Administration](#) worker from Ohio, who suggested that the agency should stop printing 90,000 copies of its internal magazine and make it available online only.