



U.S. official sorry for racial costume

Immigration chief hailed white employee in prison stripes, dark makeup

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WASHINGTON - A top immigration official has apologized after awarding "most original costume" to a Homeland Security Department employee who dressed in prison stripes, dreadlocks and dark makeup for a Halloween gathering at the agency.

Julie Myers, assistant secretary overseeing Homeland Security's Immigration and Customs Enforcement division, was part of a three-judge panel that lauded the costume, worn by a white employee, last Wednesday. She also posed for a photo with him.

Myers apologized to employees last Friday in an e-mail, saying some costumes were found to be offensive. On Friday, she called the National Association of African Americans in DHS to inform the group of what had happened, according to a letter sent to association members by the group's vice president, Sjon Shavers.

"I and the senior management at ICE deeply regret that this happened," Myers said in her e-mail, which Homeland Security's public affairs office provided to The Associated Press. "As the head of the agency, I have the responsibility to ensure every employee is a valued member of the ICE team."

The agency Myers heads is responsible for apprehending and jailing violators of immigration and customs laws, including conducting raids at work sites to round up undocumented workers.

The employee who wore the costume was not identified, but ICE spokeswoman Kelly Nantel said he was counseled by his supervisor. He was not wearing blackface but makeup that was a darker color than his skin, Nantel said.

Myers and others who saw him could not tell he was wearing makeup, Nantel said, and they learned he wore makeup when some employees complained later that day.

Photos discarded

The photo of Myers with the employee and any others taken by the official photographer showing the costume were discarded, Nantel said.

Shavers, an ICE special agent, said he learned of the incident from Myers and that his group had not received any complaints.

"These kinds of things, incidents, happen all the time, so we handle them on a case-by-case basis," Shavers said.

Lisa Navarrete, a spokeswoman for the National Council of La Raza, a national Hispanic civil rights organization, said it was completely appropriate for Myers to apologize.

"He was clearly trying to not be Caucasian. How dark or light he is, is beside the point. It is a costume that people did find and would find offensive that was sanctioned by the executives," Navarrete said. "There's obviously a sensitivity issue that ICE needs to address with its own staff."

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