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Judge: Currency biased against blind

U.S. money can't be identified by touch

By **EDMUND L. ANDREWS**
The New York Times

WASHINGTON — A federal judge here ruled Tuesday that the government illegally discriminated against blind people by printing all of its paper currency on bills of the same size that cannot be distinguished by touch.

Judge James Robertson ordered the Treasury Department to start discussing within 30 days potential remedies, including different note sizes for different denominations and raised numerals and perforated dots on the bills.

"Of the more than 180 countries that issue paper currency, only the United States prints bills that are identical in size and color in all their denominations," Robertson wrote.



THE CHANGING FACE OF MONEY

The Treasury Department has been working to stay ahead of counterfeiters. Security threads and microprinting were introduced in 1990. The portraits were enlarged in 1996, and an infrared feature was added to encourage the development of electronic readers

Robertson said that euro notes came in bigger sizes for higher denominations and had raised numerals as well as foil patches in different shapes. Japanese notes have rough

for the blind.

The latest redesign is under way. New \$10 bills, featuring splashes of orange, yellow and red, hit the market this year, following similar changes to the \$20 bill in 2003 and the \$50 bill in 2004.

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patches to help identify them by touch and other countries use sequences of perforated dots.

"The fact that each of these features is currently used in

other currencies suggests that, on the face of things, such accommodations are reasonable," Robertson wrote.

The Treasury Department refused to comment on the decision or on whether it would appeal the order, which came after a four-year court fight between the government and the American Council of the Blind.

The Treasury Department had argued that making bills identifiable by touch would create an undue financial burden for the government.

Robertson rejected that argument as well as pleas that new tactile features might undermine the anti-counterfeiting features.

Day Al-Mohamed, director of advocacy and government affairs for the American Council of the Blind, said the decision addressed a constant problem for people with little or no eyesight. ■