

**Opening Statement of Chairman Joseph Lieberman
Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee Hearing
Confirmation Hearing for James A. Williams
Washington, DC
July 25, 2008**

Good morning. Today this Committee holds a confirmation hearing on the President's recommended appointment of James A. Williams to be Administrator of the General Services Administration.

Mr. Williams, welcome.

The General Services Administration, or GSA, helps the rest of the federal government run more efficiently and effectively.

GSA is often called the federal government's "landlord" because it provides the workspace and office services for almost every federal office and agency across the nation.

But GSA is far more than just the government's landlord. Its 12,000 employees are spread across the country in 11 districts and help guide the spending of some \$500 billion for purchases of everything from basic office equipment to alternative fuel vehicles.

If GSA were a private entity it would be in the Fortune 100. Its decisions can have broad implications for the rest of the economy since, as an early acquirer of new technologies like alternative-fuel vehicles, the agency can help move those technologies from the exotic to the common place.

Given these stakes, it's important that GSA have steady leadership at the top. Unfortunately, recently this has not been the case.

If confirmed, Mr. Williams would be the fifth GSA Administrator in less than eight years following the troubled tenure of Lurita Doan.

Ms. Doan resigned after sparking Congressional and other investigations over allegations that she used her office to promote partisan politics, tried to reduce the crucial oversight role of the agency's Inspector General, and improperly interfered in the contracting process.

If confirmed, Mr. Williams would have only five months left in this Administration, it would be up to Mr. Williams – presently the commissioner of GSA's Federal Acquisition Service – to provide the leadership needed to restore confidence in GSA, keep the agency on an even course in carrying out its duty to spend American taxpayers' money wisely, and also help ease the transition to a new Administration. If he is confirmed, Mr. Williams would be the first career civil servant appointed to head GSA. I believe he brings unique qualifications to the job.

Besides his work at GSA, Mr. Williams was part of the Clinton/Gore Administration's original "Reinventing Government Team, and has also been a leader on procurement and technology issues for the Internal Revenue

Service, the Department of Homeland Security and the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative for Negotiations with the Government of Japan.

Overall, Mr. Williams has been in public service for 28 years, with 17 years as a Senior Executive – and I would like to commend you for choosing a career in service to your nation. Federal service is a worthy career.

The only controversy of which I am aware, and which I will want to discuss today, is Mr. Williams’ role in contracts involving Sun Microsystems. Specifically, GSA leadership is alleged to have improperly pressured a contracting officer to renew a contract with Sun Microsystems for computer products and services.

That disputed contract negotiation occurred at a time when Sun was under investigation by the agency’s Inspector General and the Justice Department for potential fraud in connection with its previous contracting practices with GSA.

This was one reason many in Congress lost confidence in Lurita Doan, and it will be important for this committee to understand Mr. Williams’ role, and what Mr. Williams believes could or should have been done differently in that matter.

I also wanted to review the status of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) headquarters project, which appears to be continually delayed.

DHS lacks a true headquarters and is currently spread throughout 70 buildings and 40 sites across the National Capital Region, making communication, coordination and cooperation among DHS components a significant challenge.

The current situation is detrimental to the homeland security mission, which is why I have been working with my colleague Senator Collins to secure necessary funding for the DHS headquarters project.

I would like to hear how Mr. Williams intends to complete this project in timely manner.

Again, welcome Mr. Williams. I look forward to your testimony and your answers to our questions.

You clearly have a distinguished record in service to our country; GSA is in dire need of the kind of competent leadership that you have the ability to provide. I hope that you will be able to satisfy this Committee, and ultimately the Congress, that you have and always will keep first in mind the interests of the taxpayers that we all are privileged to serve. Sen. Collins.