

Statement of Senator Susan M. Collins

**Nomination of James Williams to be  
Administrator, General Services Administration**

Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs  
July 25, 2008

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**James Williams comes to the Committee with two decades of experience in federal service in agencies ranging from the Department of Commerce and the Internal Revenue Service to the General Services Administration. Currently, Mr. Williams serves as the Commissioner of the Federal Acquisition Service.**

**That public service, which has included work on modernizing IRS business systems, helping to negotiate a supercomputer agreement with the government of Japan, and leading a contracting effort for installing weather-reconnaissance gear on**

**Air Force transports, is useful experience for the major challenges that GSA faces today and in the years ahead.**

**The size and reach of GSA's operations make meeting those challenges vital. GSA has over 13,000 employees and an annual budget of approximately \$16 billion. The agency is charged with managing nearly \$500 billion in federal assets -- including more than 8,600 government-owned or leased buildings and a fleet of 208,000 vehicles. GSA's performance has a significant impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of government-wide operations. GSA programs affect almost \$66 billion in financial transactions throughout the government.**

**As the federal government's primary acquisition agency and landlord, GSA must apply lessons that**

**this Committee has drawn from its investigations of federal contracting -- lessons that Senators Lieberman, Coleman, McCaskill, Carper and I incorporated into S. 680, a bill to reform federal acquisition practices. With total federal purchases of goods and services exceeding \$400 billion a year, Federal procurement is an area requiring better stewardship of taxpayer dollars.**

**An immediate demand on the attention of the next GSA Administrator will also be the Presidential transition. Whoever wins, hundreds of members of the President-elect's transition team will depend on GSA to establish offices and to provide technology, support services, and other essentials items immediately after Election Day.**

**GSA must work to resolve other pressing challenges as well, including the sorely needed consolidation of Department of Homeland Security offices at the St. Elizabeths Hospital complex.**

**Of particular concern to Maine and many border states is the critical role GSA plays in enhancing our nation's border security by managing the planning, design, and construction of ports of entry for Customs and Border Protection. It is now estimated that a port of entry takes more than seven years between the beginning of the planning phase and completion - this is too long. I appreciate that Mr. Williams has indicated his willingness to identify ways to shorten this time period.**

**In my home state of Maine, a new port of entry in Calais has been seriously delayed by GSA's failure**

to award the construction contract on time and to account for the presence of significant ledge - a common occurrence in Maine. These delays have real effects. Although the new international bridge connecting Calais, Maine, and St. Stephen, New Brunswick, will be completed this year, the U.S. side of the port of entry will not be completed until the end of next year. I look forward to hearing from Mr. Williams how GSA will find the funds needed to speed completion of this project and to improve GSA's efforts at our borders.

The few issues I've cited attest to the great breadth and depth of concerns that the Administrator of GSA must handle. I look forward to hearing Mr. Williams's views on these matters and his thoughts on how he would propose to manage

**the financial, planning, coordination, and other challenges they present.**

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