

**STATEMENT OF MELANIE TOWNSHEND
GILBANE BUILDING COMPANY
COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS
UNITED STATES SENATE
MARCH 28, 2007**

Thank you, Madam Chair and Ranking Member Inhofe, for conducting today's hearing and for inviting me to speak on behalf of the Associated General Contractors of America (AGC) on legislative solutions intended to make government buildings more efficient and to reduce their operational costs through the use of innovative technologies and practices.

My name is Melanie Townshend. I am a LEED Accredited Project Executive at Gilbane Building Company and am our company's Nationwide Sustainable Practices Coordinator. Gilbane is one of the nation's oldest building firms and an active member of the Associated General Contractors. Gilbane is also among the leading firms implementing sustainable design and construction practices and strategies. Our extensive knowledge base has been acquired through management of over 45 successful Green Building related projects. Additionally, Gilbane is a top builder and Construction Manager for the federal government, with a portfolio that includes the National World War II Memorial and the Department of Justice Modernization, both of which I was personally involved

The Associated General Contractors of America (AGC) is the oldest and largest of the national trade associations in the construction industry. Founded at the request of President Woodrow Wilson in 1918, AGC now represents more than 32,000 firms, including 7,000 of the nation's leading general contractors, 12,000 specialty contractors, and more than 13,000 materials suppliers and service providers.

AGC members engage in the construction of commercial buildings and public works facilities, and they prepare the sites and install the infrastructure necessary for residential and commercial development.

Madam Chair, AGC and its members are embracing green construction. We recognize that green construction is not a temporary phenomenon; it is here to stay. Accordingly, many contractors are proactively educating themselves on green construction practices. To assist in this effort, AGC is currently preparing an “AGC Contractor’s Guide to Green Building Construction” to complement several existing resources on the issue. The manual will comprehensively address green construction subjects, describing the various green building standards and rating systems, as well as the risk management, subcontracting, procurement, and operational issues associated with green construction.

AGC stands ready to facilitate and support green construction. With respect to the construction of federal facilities, AGC would simply urge the government to set clear and consistent standards. AGC does not favor any one rating system over any other.

Indeed, AGC doubts the benefit of a single definition of green construction for any and all purposes, and would note, for example, that all ratings systems should allow for variations in regional, local, and site-specific conditions and the nuances of different building types. For example hospital projects incorporate the Green Guide for Health Care as a criteria and rating mechanism, and many military construction projects incorporate SPiRiT, another Green Building rating tool. Furthermore, private sector competition should be used to encourage innovative technologies and common-sense solutions to environmental problems.

I have attached to my written testimony a one-page summary of two major green construction rating systems: Green Globes and LEED Green Building Rating System. Based on AGC members’ experience, Green Globes may be more suitable for mainstream construction, and LEED may be more appropriate for high performance or “top tier” buildings. But again, AGC does not endorse one system over another.

Madam Chair, you specifically requested AGC’s comments on S. ___, the *Public Buildings Cost Reduction Act of 2007*. Overall, the bill does not raise serious concerns. AGC would, however, note the language included in Section 2(b) of the legislation with

respect to the plan for energy efficiency at General Services Administration (GSA) facilities. Specifically, the language contained in Section 2(b)(2)(E) requires GSA to recommend “language for uniform standards for use by Federal agencies in implementing cost-effective technology and practices.” AGC has some concerns that this language would lead GSA to favor one rating system over another. AGC supports uniformity, but would suggest that GSA build its language around the common elements of the several rating systems currently in place.

While this issue may be outside the jurisdiction of this Committee, AGC also encourages Congress to enact legislation to allow tax-exempt financing for green construction projects. Green bonds make it easier for construction project owners to offset the cost of site remediation, sustainable design features, and environmentally-friendly technologies or products. In addition, AGC supports legislation pending in the U.S. House of Representatives, H.R. 539, the *Buildings for the 21st Century Act*, which would extend the Commercial Building Tax Deduction originally enacted as part of the Energy Policy Act of 2005 until 2013 and increase it from \$1.80 to \$2.25 per square foot.

In addition to building green facilities for our owners to achieve larger societal environmental sustainability goals, AGC understands that construction operations also impact the environment. AGC and its members strive to comply with all applicable environmental laws, regulations, and permit requirements, and to minimize the environmental impact of construction operations on a daily basis.

Green construction further encourages contractors to discuss and put practices into place to minimize the impact of their operations on the environment. Examples include site layout to minimize site disturbance, erosion, and run off during construction; minimizing the use of fossil fuel and emissions through conservation and alternate fuels; reduced waste through material recycling and reuse; and improved indoor air quality during construction by using low-emitting materials.

AGC is also leading by example. We recently opened our new headquarters, located at 2300 Wilson Boulevard in Arlington, Virginia, which was designed to achieve a LEED Silver level of certification. Environmentally-sensitive systems in our new facility will save occupants around \$75,000 a year in energy costs and \$5,000 a year in water use.

AGC again appreciates the opportunity to participate in today's hearing. AGC stands ready to facilitate and support green construction, and encourages the Committee to further promote its use in the public and private sectors. We look forward to working with you on this and other construction issues.

Thank you.