

Opening Statement

General Services Administration

Administrator Martha Johnson

Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs

Subcommittee on Contracting Oversight

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Chairwoman McCaskill and Ranking Member Portman, I am Martha Johnson, Administrator of the General Services Administration. I took the oath of office on February 7, 2010 and I am honored to serve in this capacity. I would like to thank each of you for the opportunity to appear before the Senate Subcommittee on Contracting Oversight today. As requested, I am here today to speak to the General Services Administration's award, management and oversight of the Jane Mobley Associates' contract.

In November 2009, GSA's Heartland Region began to receive media and public inquiries revolving around health and safety issues at the Bannister Federal Complex. The Bannister Federal Complex consists of 5 million square feet of mixed-use space with 42 buildings, GSA controls 12 buildings totaling 2 million square feet. From the 1940s through the mid 1970s, the ownership and control of the property was divided between GSA and the Department of Energy.

By late January 2010, these inquiries had increased twofold, causing unprecedented tenant and employee concerns about the safety of the Bannister Federal Complex.

The quantity and complex nature of these media inquiries as well as various government reports regarding the Bannister Federal Complex indicated the need for a more advanced level of communications expertise than the Heartland Region could provide in house.

At the urging of the Administrators' office, the Heartland Region consulted with the Regional Environmental Protection Agency. Given EPA's experience with environmental communications, the EPA Associate Regional Administrator recommended a local communications firm, Jane Mobley Associates Inc.

In addition to their listed professional references, EPA indicated that Jane Mobley Associates had first hand environmental crisis management experience, experience with evaluating and translating technical data and in fact had previously worked with other government agencies.

Relying on EPA's superior experience with environmental crisis management and communications, GSA sought guidance on framing the statement of work from EPA. EPA appropriately provided the required assistance and GSA then negotiated a final statement of work with Jane Mobley Associates.

Upon finalizing the statement of work, the Heartland Region expedited the retention of Jane Mobley Associates. The expedited timeline for selection was based on the existing "urgent and compelling" circumstances. GSA believed that these circumstances existed because of employee and tenant concerns that conditions impaired their ability to work.

On February 5, 2010 the Heartland Region entered into a one month contract for services with Jane Mobley Associates.

The Heartland Region and Jane Mobley Associates developed a communications plan, discussed test results in reports commissioned by the EPA and National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, and created a contingency plan for an alternate site for the child care center.

Significant progress on local communications had been made after one month. However, the Heartland Region was still not comfortable in its capacity to respond to multiple inquiries from the media, current and former employees and the public. Moreover it was apparent that extensive outreach and coordination were still needed to address the public concerns.

On March 8, 2010, the Heartland Region issued a modification to the existing contract to extend the services under the original agreement. The scope of work and discussions with JMA made clear that the last two months were to serve as a transition period, during which GSA would assume and manage these responsibilities in-house. Jane Mobley Associates assisted GSA in providing clarity on issues, performed extensive research and facilitated meetings between GSA, EPA and the Department of Energy.

Jane Mobley Associates also assisted in the further development of the skills and knowledge of in-house staff in preparation for assuming the communications role for this issue.

In sum, GSA was faced with a series of complex issues at the Bannister Federal Complex and since the health and safety of GSA employees is our number one responsibility, the Heartland Region moved swiftly to address employee and community concerns and prevented continued harm to the agency.

Pursuant to the Inspector General's Report which contained a list of recommendations, GSA has taken proactive steps in pursuit of those goals which I believe will further enhance the safety and management of the Bannister Federal Complex. First, we have developed an environmental work plan and quality assurance project. Second, we have finalized a GSA

regional environmental management system to manage and monitor the regional program in accordance with EPA guidance. Third, we have established a system where information released goes through a multi-step review process to ensure accuracy. In view of the above, I believe these positive steps illustrate our true desire to achieve transparency, accountability and better management of those challenging issues that have appeared at the Bannister Federal Complex.

This concludes my remarks and I look forward to a productive discussion with the committee today.