

OVERSIGHT OF GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS AND LEASES

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I believe it is our responsibility as Members of Congress to do unglamorous work called oversight. It is our duty to make sure our governmental agencies are, on a daily basis, spending money wisely and not ripping off the American taxpayer. I believe that is a constitutional duty. I believe we are legitimately criticized in this body for not being more aggressive about that. I have tried to resolve it. I am going to do better. I am going to take some action with regard to what I consider to be poor expenditures of money.

I initiated a project in my office I call "Integrity Watch." We examine suspected cases of waste, fraud, and abuse in the Federal Government. I think that is healthy.

I have exposed the enormous costs associated with the building of a new United Nations mission in New York. That building came in at \$88 million. It is nothing more than an office space for governmental employees who work at the U.N., and for two-thirds of the year almost half as many people are there. Only half the year will the space be nearly utilized.

It came in on a per square foot basis as the most expensive building that this Government has ever built—more expensive than our great Federal courthouses, some of which have been criticized like the one in Boston. It is more expensive per square foot than those great Federal courthouses.

Today I alert my colleagues to a problem I have noted. I hope we are not seeing a pattern of abuse of taxpayers.

The General Services Administration, the Government's landlord, is responsible for purchasing, leasing, and refurbishing the buildings that house Federal agencies and Departments. My concern is that too often Congress is simply rubber stamping leasing requests of GSA without exercising careful oversight responsibilities. Specifically, I am concerned about the proposed expenditure of Federal funds to lease space for the Department of Transportation and the procedure being used in that process.

In 1996, GSA came to Congress to receive authorization to secure a new lease for DOT. The current lease was to expire on March 31 of 2000. The prospectus GSA provided to Congress was very simple. It plainly stated that GSA "proposes a replacement lease of 1,199,000 to 1,320,000 rentable square feet of space and 145 official inside parking spaces for the Department of Transportation."

That was basically it.

On November 6 of 1997, the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, of which I was a member at that time, approved a resolution authorizing GSA to secure an operating lease for the headquarters. The resolution was just as simple as the prospectus. It was a one-page resolution authorizing GSA to enter into an oper-

ating lease not to exceed 20 years for approximately 1.1 million net usable square feet of space plus 145 official parking spaces at an estimated annual cost of \$55 million plus escalations.

Almost 2 years after GSA was given the go-ahead to procure the lease, the agency issued a 250-page solicitation for offers asking people to make proposals to secure this space for DOT. Buried in this SFO—Solicitation for Offers—are a number of alarming statements used by GSA in making its decision which may have a profound impact on the cost and the quality of the building, and, more importantly, the expense that we as taxpayers will pay over the next few decades.

It strikes me that GSA may well be deliberately ignoring their 1997 mandate, or at least violating the spirit and intent of the congressional authorization. One only needs to review the 250-page SFO to determine that GSA has decided unilaterally to go far beyond what they were authorized to lease by Congress.

Specifically, the requirement in the SFO that proposals are to provide a level of quality consistent with "the highest quality commercial office buildings over 250,000 square feet in Washington, DC."

I don't believe a Federal office building has to be equal to the highest quality private office space in this city. Federal dollars are paying for the building—taxpayer dollars—and that requirement cannot be justified.

Additionally, the congressional authorizing resolution said nothing about GSA securing a lease equal to the highest quality commercial building. They weren't given that commission.

I am also concerned about what appears to be the lavish excesses included in the performance specifications. Just for example, the SFO explains that the passenger elevators—this is not a ceremonial building; this is an office building—are to be made of "premium quality natural stone or terrazzo," and that the walls in each passenger elevator are to be "a combination of premium quality architectural wood paneling, premium quality natural stone, and finished metal."

I think this shows a real sense of disconnect from the American people, even of arrogance. Most families in the United States work hard to achieve the American dream of building and owning a home but can't afford to place "premium quality architectural wood paneling" in their home. Why should their hard-earned tax dollars that are extracted from them be spent so that Government workers can ride up and down these elevators with "premium quality natural stone" floors?

Additionally, I am concerned that other Government agencies will come to expect this same "highest quality, best-in-class" office space in Washington, DC, whether in a leased or renovated Government building. This could have a snowballing effect and create a procurement and budgetary drain on the country.

I am also disturbed by GSA's clear statement that price and cost to the Government are significantly less important than the scoring on technical factors.

In Alabama, families who are building a home first start with a budget. Once they begin to design a home, if they cannot afford a "premium quality natural stone or terrazzo" floor for the dining room, they may be forced to settle for a less expensive alternative. For the majority of families in this country, price and cost are the determining factors in all their decisions when they are building a new home. Why should the Government think it should act differently?

It is my belief that among the finalists who can clearly and credibly show that they meet the space and program requirements of the SFO, price and cost should clearly be the determining factor ultimately in making the lease award. To select a building on any other basis than best value seems, to me, quite unjustifiable.

In the next few weeks, GSA will make their decision on the location of the Department of Transportation headquarters building. I will be sending a letter to Senator BOB SMITH, the outstanding chairman of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works. I thank Chairman SMITH for taking a hard look at the U.N. building, too, in his role as the committee chairman. I will ask him and his committee to work with me to look into the procedures and standards that were passed by Congress in 1997 versus the solicitation for offer being used by GSA today for the Department of Transportation building.

I am afraid that under the current system, GSA is working with vague guidelines from Congress, very vague guidelines. In fact, their language, as I noted earlier, was "\$55 million plus escalations." That is not a crack in the door. That is a wide-open door, big enough to drive a truck through. I think they are using these vague guidelines, and these guidelines allow them to be free to set their own standards, potentially allowing them to commit to a building of unjustifiable expense.

I believe this Congress has a responsibility to our constituents to oversee and ensure all Government leases and all Government expenditures across the board, and that they are awarded to provide the Government the best quality. If we refuse to look at this, I believe we will have failed the taxpayers who will be paying for this bill. We will be potentially burdening them with an exorbitant price tag for simple office space beyond reason and justification.

I believe if we allow GSA to proceed with their current plans, we will not have followed through on our requirements of oversight to ensure that these moneys for lease space are properly approved. We want good space for the employees at the Department of Transportation. I hear they are happy where

they are. They are not asking to go to a new building or have a new building. We need to be sure that we give them a new 15-year lease, wherever it is, and that it is comparable in price. We ought not to spend a whole bunch of money to get a fancy new building somewhere at much greater expense than what they have if they are happy where they are. This is not a building that is old; it is about 30 years old. We need to look at that. I will be writing the chairman. I think we need to talk more about that.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate immediately proceed to executive session to consider the following nomination on today's Executive Calendar: No. 659, John E. McLaughlin, of Pennsylvania, to be Deputy Director of Central Intelligence.

I further ask unanimous consent the nomination be confirmed, the motion to consider be laid upon the table, the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action, and the Senate then return to legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The nomination considered and confirmed is as follows:

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

John E. McLaughlin, of Pennsylvania, to be Deputy Director of Central Intelligence.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume legislative session.

ORDER FOR STAR PRINT

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that S. Res. 376, previously agreed to, be modified and star printed with the changes that are at the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

ORDER FOR STAR PRINT

Mr. SESSIONS. I further ask unanimous consent that the report to accompany S. 2580 be star printed with the changes that are at the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

REAUTHORIZING GRANTS UNDER THE WATER RESOURCES RESEARCH ACT OF 1984

Mr. SESSIONS. I ask unanimous consent that the Environment and Public Works Committee be discharged from further consideration of H.R. 4132, and the Senate then proceed to its immediate consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 4132) to reauthorize grants for water resources research and technology institutes established under the Water Resources Research Act of 1984.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the bill be read the third time and passed, the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table, and any statements relating to the bill be printed in the RECORD.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The bill (H.R. 4132) was read the third time and passed.

RELEASE OF MR. EDMOND POPE

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of H. Con. Res. 404, which is at the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the resolution by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 404) calling for the immediate release of Mr. Edmond Pope from prison in the Russian Federation for humanitarian reasons, and for other purposes.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the concurrent resolution.

Mr. SESSIONS. I ask unanimous consent the resolution be agreed to, the preamble be agreed to, the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table, and any statements relating to the resolution be printed in the RECORD.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 404) was agreed to.

The preamble was agreed to.

RECOGNIZING AND ADMITTING ISRAEL'S MAGEN DAVID ADOM SOCIETY

Mr. SESSIONS. I ask unanimous consent the Senate now proceed to the immediate consideration of Calendar No. 863, S. Res. 343.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the resolution by title.

A resolution (S. Res. 343) expressing the sense of the Senate that the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement should recognize and admit to full membership Israel's Magen David Adom Society, with its emblem, the Red Shield of David.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the resolution.

Mr. SESSIONS. I ask unanimous consent the resolution be agreed to, the preamble be agreed to, the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table, and any statements relating to this resolution be printed in the RECORD.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The resolution (S. Res. 343) was agreed to.

The preamble was agreed to.

The resolution, with its preamble, reads as follows:

S. RES. 343

Whereas Israel's Magen David Adom Society has since 1930 provided emergency relief to people in many countries in times of need, pain, and suffering, regardless of nationality or religious affiliation;

Whereas in the past year alone, the Magen David Adom Society has provided invaluable humanitarian services in Kosovo, Indonesia, Ethiopia, and Eritrea, as well as Greece and Turkey in the wake of the earthquakes that devastated these countries;

Whereas the American Red Cross has recognized the superb and invaluable work done by the Magen David Adom Society and considers the exclusion of the Magen David Adom Society from the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement "an injustice of the highest order";

Whereas the American Red Cross has repeatedly urged that the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement recognize the Magen David Adom Society as a full member, with its emblem;

Whereas the Magen David Adom Society utilizes the Red Shield of David as its emblem, in similar fashion to the utilization of the Red Cross and Red Crescent by other national societies;

Whereas the Red Cross and the Red Crescent have been recognized as protective emblems under the Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement;

Whereas the International Committee of the Red Cross has ignored previous requests from the United States Congress to recognize the Magen David Adom Society;

Whereas the Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement state that it "makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions," and it "may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature";

Whereas although similar national organizations of Iraq, North Korea, and Afghanistan are recognized as full members of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the Magen David Adom Society has been denied membership since 1949;

Whereas in the six fiscal years 1994 through 1999, the United States Government provided a total of \$631,000,000 to the International Committee of the Red Cross and \$82,000,000 to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies; and

Whereas in fiscal year 1999 alone, the United States Government provided \$119,500,000 to the International Committee of the Red Cross and \$7,300,000 to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That—

(1) the International Committee of the Red Cross should immediately recognize the Magen David Adom Society and the Magen David Adom Society should be granted full membership in the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement;

(2) the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies should grant full membership to the Magen David Adom Society immediately following recognition by the International Committee of the Red Cross of the Magen David Adom Society;

(3) the Magen David Adom Society should not be required to give up or diminish its use of its emblem as a condition for immediate and full membership in the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement; and