

Senator Scott P. Brown (R-MA)

Testimony

House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings & Emergency Management

“Sitting on Our Assets: The Cotton Annex”

Thank you Mr. Chairman, and Ranking Member Holmes Norton, for holding today’s important hearing on excess federal property. It’s been a pleasure working with you, Mr. Chairman, on the Civilian Property Realignment Act (CPRA), and I congratulate you on its passage out of the House last month.

As this committee knows, the federal government owns over 45,000 excess and underutilized properties. According to GAO, these properties cost American taxpayers over \$1.7 billion a year to maintain and operate, which is one of the reasons GAO has put federal property management on its “high risk” list. Despite this high risk status, little has been done to successfully address the problem.

The current disposal process, led by the Federal Real Property Council (FRPC) is mired in bureaucratic red tape, politics, competing stakeholder interests, and other inefficiencies. Mr. Chairman, the current process is broken. President Obama has acknowledged that the process is broken. So simply accepting the status quo and codifying the FRPC, with some modest changes as alternative proposals suggest, will do little to guarantee that properties are disposed of.

Look at the building we’re in today; a nearly 90,000 square foot building sitting on prime real estate that has an estimated value of \$150 million. Yet it has been sitting empty for over 5 years while the taxpayers foot the bill for its maintenance. Mr. Chairman, this building, which is down the street from Congress, serves as a symbol of the culture of complacency our government has towards wasting taxpayer dollars. With over \$15 trillion in debt, taxpayers cannot afford for Washington to continue business as usual.

In today’s political environment, it seems that everything is turned into a partisan fight, with little being accomplished. Even common sense legislation, like the STOCK ACT has struggled to make it through Congress. But, fighting waste, fraud and abuse in the federal government is not a partisan issue. Saving taxpayer dollars is not a partisan objective. So I am pleased to announce that today, in a bipartisan effort, Senator Mark Warner and I are introducing the Civilian Property Realignment Act of 2012.

Senator Warner and I have been working to improve the CPRA legislation I introduced last August. Our bipartisan legislation takes the necessary steps to ensure the best use of federal

property for taxpayers, because it's time that the government put the best interest of the taxpayers first. Our improvements also strengthen the legislation's deficit reduction goal by requiring a minimum of 80% of proceeds and savings go to the treasury for deficit reduction, rather than being used to pad federal agencies' budgets.

I strongly believe that an independent commission, like the one established through CPRA, is the only viable way to overcome the hurdles in the disposal process created by competing stakeholder interests. I also believe that the streamlined process created by CPRA is the best way to break through the red tape and ensure that properties are actually disposed of.

President Obama proposed CPRA last year, and under your leadership, Mr. Chairman, it was successfully passed out of the House. So we're two thirds of the way to having this critical legislation signed into law. Senator Warner and I look forward to working with Chairman Barbara Boxer on the Environment and Public Works Committee, and our other colleagues in the Senate, to ensure CPRA's passage in the Senate.

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate your leadership in the House on this important issue and look forward to the enactment of CPRA. Thank you.