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New York Officials Praise President Bush for Governors Island Conveyance

NEW YORK CITY—The historic transfer of Governors Island today fulfills President George W. Bush's commitment to convey the former U.S. Coast Guard base to the City and State of New York.

State and City Officials plan to use the island, located off the tip of Manhattan, for educational, historical and recreational purposes. As part of the transfer agreement signed today, the island's historic monument consisting of Castle Williams and Fort Jay, along with 22 adjacent acres, is conveyed to the U.S. Department of Interior.

Disposition of Governors Island and preservation of its historic elements have been priorities of the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) since President Bush announced his intentions in April 2002, and since Congress directed GSA to assume responsibility for its disposal in 1995.

"We are very proud that, working together, we could meet the President's vision." GSA Administrator Stephen A. Perry said today. "The transfer of Governors Island is a significant accomplishment for GSA, one that involved strong working partnerships among our agency, the Coast Guard, the Department of the Interior, and the State and City of New York."

GSA's New York Regional Office, in partnership with the U.S. Coast Guard, has been responsible for stewardship of Governors Island since 1997.

"Governors Island belongs with New York. It is only fitting that it return to the City and State and be put to productive use again," said Karl Reichelt, GSA Regional Administrator in New York. "Our job now is to seamlessly transition the Island to New York, to fully accomplish the mission President Bush assigned to us."

Reichelt specifically highlighted the efforts of New York Governor George E. Pataki, New York City Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, and Congressman Jerrold Nadler as instrumental to the process.

"Through their leadership - and with the best for all of New York constantly in mind - they made it happen for our City and State," Reichelt said. "There exists a true working partnership that bodes well for the future of the Island."

Said Governor Pataki: "All New Yorkers are grateful that once again, President Bush has demonstrated his tremendous concern for the well-being of New York, this time by returning Governors Island . . . to the citizens of our great State and City." The Governor noted that with cooperation from the state, city, and federal governments, "today's historic agreement will become the foundation for a host of educational and cultural pursuits, while simultaneously giving New Yorkers access to a new public park and waterfront esplanade."

Said Mayor Bloomberg: "We are extremely grateful to President Bush for his commitment to the people of New York and for this remarkable investment in our future. We won't let you down."

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Said Rep. Nadler: “I’m elated that one of New York’s crown jewels is being returned to its rightful owner. I thank the Administration for doing the right thing, and I now look forward to working with the residents, the Governor, the Mayor and local groups to ensure the Island is open to all to enjoy.”

Under the transfer agreement, Governors Island was conveyed according to the Balanced Budget Act of 1997. The Act directed GSA to dispose of the island after Oct. 1, 2002 and to allow the City and State of New York the right to first offer. In a concurrent agreement, historic Fort Jay and Castle Williams, designated national monuments in January 2001, and approximately 22 adjacent acres, were conveyed to the National Parks Service within the Department of Interior.

Governor’s Island comprises 172 acres and 225 buildings. Half the island, whose oldest buildings date to the 1700s, is designated as a National Historic District. The Coast Guard took over the island in 1966. The island had been home to the U.S. Army for 150 years until 1966. GSA assumed responsibility for the island’s disposition in 1995, following the Coast Guard’s announcement that its Atlantic Command Headquarters would vacate the property. After the Coast Guard closed the base in 1997, GSA’s Northeast and Caribbean Region, headquartered in New York City, and its Property Disposal Division, headquartered in its New England Region, continued to work closely with Coast Guard officials to provide protection and maintenance. GSA’s New England Region dedicated the last eight months to successfully negotiate today’s conveyance.

Over the past several years GSA set the stage for disposal, by:

- Preparing a Land Use Study and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act;
- Sponsoring forums in New York City to provide opportunities for public proposals and comments;
- Hosting hundreds of tours, so members of the public could view the island’s facilities, experience its unique charms, and better understand the island’s potential; and
- Producing a historic preservation and design guide for the historic area, in partnership with the President’s Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the New York State Historic Preservation Office, the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission and the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

GSA is a centralized federal procurement and property management agency created by Congress to improve government efficiency and help federal agencies better serve the public. It acquires, on behalf of federal agencies, office space, equipment, telecommunications, information technology, supplies and services. GSA, comprised of 14,000 associates, provides services and solutions for the office operations of over 1 million federal workers located in 8,300 government -owned and leased buildings in 1,600 U.S. communities.