

**Statement of Christine A. Merdon, P.E.
Acting Architect of the Capitol**



Architect of the Capitol Fiscal Year 2020 Appropriations

**Statement before the Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch,
Committee on Appropriations, United States Senate**

March 27, 2019

Chairwoman Hyde Smith, Ranking Member Murphy and members of the subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to present the Architect of the Capitol's (AOC) Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 budget. Our request of \$832 million will allow the agency to successfully meet our mission with a proactive focus on people, projects and preservation.

Prior to becoming Acting Architect of the Capitol, I spent eight years as the Deputy Architect of the Capitol and the Chief Operating Officer. I learned much about the agency, Congress and the needs of the Capitol campus in that role. And I am energized by the people who work here. The AOC's small but nimble group of employees is not always recognized, but their work matters greatly, and they have a passion and desire to do the best job possible to serve Congress and the Supreme Court, preserve America's Capitol, and inspire memorable visitor experiences.



U.S. CAPITOL DOME AND THE STATUE OF FREEDOM

The AOC is the steward of the U.S. Capitol, Library of Congress buildings, U.S. Supreme Court, U.S. Botanic Garden and surrounding office buildings, grounds and other facilities. I am proud of what we have accomplished this year. Nearly one-half of the campus' buildings are undergoing stone restoration as weather, age and environmental conditions are destroying many of the finer details of our monumental buildings. The Capitol Power Plant's cogeneration system began generating electricity and steam, which will be the biggest single contributor to the AOC's energy reduction in the coming years. We completed the first phases of the Cannon Renewal and the House Child Care Center expansion projects. The Capitol Visitor Center welcomed its 21 millionth visitor, and the U.S. Botanic Garden engaged nearly a million visitors with innovative educational programs and seasonal exhibits. We also collaborated with partners to provide extraordinary support for special events on the Capitol campus, including the Lying in Honor ceremony for the Reverend Billy Graham, the Lying in State ceremonies for Senator John McCain and President George H.W. Bush, and the celebration of the 225th anniversary of the laying of the Capitol cornerstone.

Despite these successful initiatives, we continue to face great challenges. The AOC is working hard to keep pace with our continually expanding footprint and increased responsibilities. We must ratchet up our efforts to attract and retain talented employees who are engaged and passionate about their work; support projects that are forward-focused and incorporate a broad view of the structure and growing needs of the Capitol campus; and position the agency as the authority on historic preservation to ensure that future generations can continue to take pride in the facilities and art under our care. I think of these challenges as the three Ps: people, projects and preservation.

People

The AOC has some of the most talented and widely admired craftsmen, tradesmen, artists, architects, engineers and scholars. Over the years, our agency has earned a well-deserved reputation as an agency with a “can-do” attitude. We have taken on new responsibilities and are committed to meeting ever-increasing workloads. However, there are areas that we need to improve. The most significant of these is attracting and retaining talented employees.



AOC EMPLOYEES ARE HIGHLY SKILLED, WELL-TRAINED AND EXTREMELY DEDICATED

Much of our work is very specific and highly specialized. Surveys indicate that for the skilled trades — welders, electricians, machinists and others that are prevalent in construction and facilities management — the shrinking talent pool is likely to become more acute. Recruiting and retaining skilled professionals is increasingly competitive.

Since FY 2015, the AOC has strategically prioritized requested budgetary increases for our capital program at the expense of our operational needs. Congress supported our plan and provided significant increases in our capital program that have and will continue to address many critical repairs to our facilities and building systems across campus. In order to maximize the impact of these increases, our FY 2020 budget requests a 9.2 percent increase to begin recruiting necessary personnel and updating critical support systems.

With the expansion of new responsibilities and the ongoing and planned construction of new facilities both on and off campus, additional in-house resources are needed to lead and manage increasing campus-wide project design and development, construction oversight, and project management requirements. Personnel are required to reduce contract award and administrative lead times, and to avoid project delays and cost overruns. As our campus ages and our systems are updated, we need better support for emergency response, fire safety inspection efforts and oversight of fire and safety operations.



RESOURCES ARE NEEDED TO KEEP PACE WITH GROWING OPERATIONAL AND PROJECT SUPPORT REQUIREMENTS

The AOC must also update and improve several critical information technology systems which we have identified as an agency enterprise risk. Our network is supported by decades-old infrastructure and end-of-life equipment that must be modernized. We are requesting increased funding to protect our critical infrastructure and meet the Legislative Branch Cybersecurity Working Group initiative to harden networks and defend legislative branch systems against malicious cyber activity.

Projects

The AOC has a unique and important role. We have a responsibility to develop a vision for the future of the Capitol campus that will serve Capitol Hill and the American people well into the future. The decisions that we make about projects and priorities are important to preserve this beacon of American democracy for many generations.

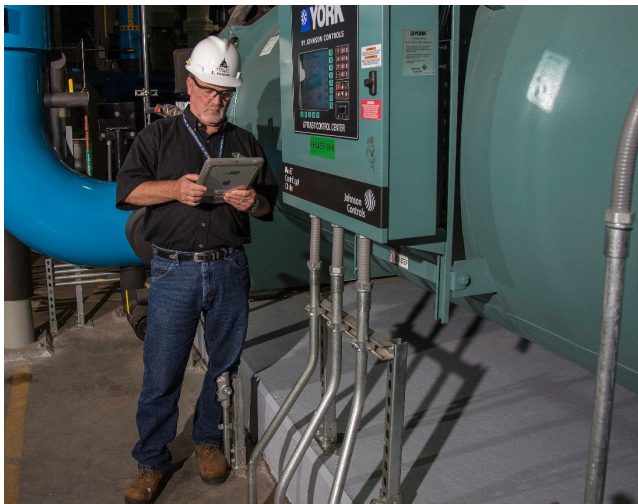
Adhering to a plan is important to me. Each year we use a risk-based process to prioritize needed projects. In FY 2020, we are requesting \$175 million for projects that will provide necessary maintenance to our energy delivery infrastructure, facilitate the next presidential inauguration as well as enhance security measures around the campus.



THE AOC'S RISK-BASED PROJECT PRIORITIZATION PROCESS STRATEGICALLY IDENTIFIES PROJECTS

Current projects across the campus include campus-wide stone and metal rehabilitation, garage and landscape restorations, House and Senate office building renewals, upgrades to security, fire and life safety systems, improvements to visitor services, and energy resilience and sustainability initiatives. Within our FY 2020 Line Item Construction Program (LICP) request, approximately \$58.2 million (25 percent) will be used to complete the next phases of several critical infrastructure projects. Projects that were requested in FY 2019 but did not secure funding represent an additional \$25.3 million (11 percent).

All of our current and planned work comes with potential impacts to daily operations, and I am cognizant of potential construction fatigue — within the AOC, among members of Congress and their staffs, as well as our Capitol Hill neighbors. We will continue to communicate consistently with our stakeholders, work hard to minimize disruptions to the Capitol Hill community and those who visit, and always remain cognizant that the business of the nation is taking place here.



CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE SYSTEMS ARE IN NEED OF MODERNIZATIONS AND REPLACEMENT ACROSS CAMPUS

The AOC's FY 2020 request continues to focus on space and storage needs to be able to accommodate the growth of the AOC, congressional staff, Library of Congress collections and Supreme Court personnel. Security requirements and their ever-evolving needs and responsibilities also remain a priority.

Preservation

Our heritage assets include buildings, monuments, landscapes, fountains, fine art, archival records and botanic assets. Their value is priceless. Over the last several years, we have expanded our foundational preservation documents, including building preservation guides and cultural landscape reports. We use these documents and our historic preservation policy as planning tools for restoring, renewing and reclaiming our heritage assets to a standard that is appropriate for the nation's capital and the worldwide symbol of American democracy.



CONSERVATION WORK ON THE ROTUNDA FRIEZE

The Architect of the Capitol is one of the few organizations where staff architects and engineers work directly with highly skilled, in-house preservation artisans daily. The buildings on Capitol Hill were carefully and purposefully designed and constructed, and this tradition continues.

Much like an ounce of prevention being worth a pound of cure, adherence to conservation principles and regular maintenance will ensure we are successful in preserving our national treasures for years to come. To that end, our FY 2020 budget request includes more than \$60 million in projects that will continue to preserve the U.S. Capitol's exterior façade for future generations and ensure the historic architectural features of the Library of Congress buildings and major campus landmarks retain their original beauty.

Over the past couple of years, the agency has worked hard to tackle aspirational plans and identify campus-wide solutions that help us to stitch the Capitol campus into a true campus environment. When I think of the things that I want the agency to accomplish under my leadership, I know that it will only be possible by focusing on the people, projects and historic

preservation needed to uphold the unified and symbolic vision for the Capitol campus inherited from the nation's founders.

Thank you for your continued support and consideration of our FY 2020 budget request.