



# Statement of Thomas Austin, Architect

## Committee on House Administration Hearing, Architect of the Capitol

June 3, 2026

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Chairman Steil, Ranking Member Morelle, and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Architect of the Capitol (AOC). We remain committed to collaborating closely with you and your staff to ensure the AOC meets the needs and expectations of the U.S. House of Representatives in service to Congress and the American people.

It is a privilege to be a steward of the historic buildings and grounds that make up the Capitol campus, ensuring their preservation, functionality, and safety for Members of Congress, staff, and visitors, while providing an enduring and inspiring home for American democracy.

On behalf of the entire leadership team, I want to express our sincere gratitude to the more than 2,600 hardworking and devoted AOC employees who consistently carry out their duties in support of Congress, the Supreme Court, the Library of Congress (Library), and the many other AOC-managed facilities with diligence and pride.

During my tenure, I have made it a priority to provide consistent, transparent communication with Members of Congress and their staff, other legislative support agencies, and Architect of the Capitol employees. Accurate and timely engagement is essential to maintaining trust and confidence in our agency's leadership. From managing routine maintenance to shaping the agency's long-term goals, I am committed to providing information that is objective, reliable and delivered promptly.

In maintaining the trust required with this role, I strive to lead with openness, honesty and integrity as we meet our mission to serve Congress and the Supreme Court, preserve America's Capitol, and inspire memorable experiences.

### 1. Overview

Our staff works tirelessly to maintain and preserve over 18.5 million square feet of facilities, 570 acres of grounds, and thousands of works of art. Operating 24 hours a day, seven days a week, the team works in concert to protect and sustain our historic assets and maintain aging infrastructure. Beyond these preservation and maintenance priorities, our team is also responsible for executing ceremonial and civic events that define the nation's democratic and seasonal traditions and bring together millions of visitors each year.

As stewards of our nation's center of democracy, the Architect of the Capitol is responsible for creating, maintaining, and improving infrastructure that ensures life-safety and physical security, addressing critical infrastructure needs, preserving historic assets, and investing in modernization efforts across the Capitol campus.

This year, we have prioritized the completion of major campus projects to enable the initiation of others, and continued infrastructure improvements across campus. The Cannon House Office Building Renewal

is expected to be completed this month and has provided many lessons learned for the agency, which we intend to utilize in planning and executing upcoming major projects, like the Rayburn House Office Building Renovation. We continue to address aging infrastructure through restoration and modernization projects for campus security, building safety, and conveyance systems.

I want to thank this committee for your continued support of AOC projects and legislative initiatives focused on streamlining our functionality as an agency and providing oversight to ensure we are meeting our mission in service to Congress and the American people.

## **2. Maintenance and Modernization of Aging Infrastructure**

The AOC is dedicated to a long-term facilities management strategy that emphasizes the maintenance, preservation and modernization of the Capitol campus. The aging infrastructure and facilities on campus present ongoing challenges, further compounded by the need for uninterrupted operations and unforeseen emergency repairs. To help meet this challenge, the AOC is developing the Capitol Complex Master Plan (CCMP) to provide a strategic framework for addressing deferred maintenance and capital renewal for all facilities across the Capitol campus over the next 20 years. One part of the CCMP focuses on near-term critical capital investments necessary to address deteriorating historic facilities, space shortfalls, and infrastructure resilience needed to support congressional operations, campus security, and the life safety of everyone who works at or visits the Capitol campus.

The critical priorities for maintenance and modernization include replacing air handling units in the House office buildings, maintaining and monitoring aging elevators, upgrading hearing rooms for accessibility and technology capacity, and renovating fire alarm and suppression systems.

Earlier this year, our House Office Buildings jurisdiction awarded a pilot project to upgrade our elevator control systems. This pilot will restore remote network monitoring in our House office building elevators, which will improve our maintenance response times and shorten elevator outages. Additionally, the AOC continues to develop its Enterprise Asset Management system to enable a more integrated, lifecycle-based approach to managing, coordinating, and overseeing facilities, equipment, and infrastructure. A well-developed asset management system will provide detailed insights into asset conditions and the necessary data for forecasting capital renewal and prioritizing projects, while also addressing backlog and deferred maintenance.

## **3. Prioritizing Physical Security and Life Safety**

We remain committed to ensuring that physical security and life safety are always prioritized. Your support has enabled the AOC to make substantial progress in strengthening security measures with projects to improve pedestrian screening, harden external windows and doors, and modernize security technology. Collaboration with internal and external partners has bolstered emergency planning and security for events across the Capitol campus. We will soon break ground on the South Screening Facility, a major security infrastructure project on the south side of the Capitol Building, which will increase security capacity and improve operations for the U.S. Capitol Police. We continue end-of-life replacements of security infrastructure across the Capitol campus and renewal projects for Capitol Police facilities, which are necessary for the safety and security of Members, staff and the public.

The agency also remains committed to AOC employee safety, dedicating time and attention to essential training, workplace safety measures, and emergency management. The safety and well-being of our employees are essential to their ability to carry out the agency's mission.

#### **4. Supporting Continuity of Congress and the House Community**

As the Cannon House Office Building Renewal project enters its close-out phase, we are proud that it has delivered measurable benefits to the community. We are returning the building to full operation and have successfully addressed unique challenges to preserve historic spaces while enhancing functionality.

Many of our buildings require significant investment, but the next priority is the much-needed renovation of the Rayburn House Office Building, the largest and most urgent infrastructure project on the campus. Based on my professional observations and evaluation of the facility assessments, I am most concerned with the level of risk of a catastrophic system failure in Rayburn in its current state. The condition of Rayburn is at a serious juncture, and time is of the essence to address risks to operational reliability, life safety, and the continuity of congressional operations.

Aging mechanical systems, persistent leaks, and structural deterioration have made a full-scale renovation essential. As many of the building systems are well beyond their useful life, we have noticed a concerning rise in the frequency of mechanical, electrical, and plumbing issues in the facility. In the past year alone, we had to address frequent elevator and escalator outages, major mechanical failures, multiple fire incidents, and dozens of water intrusions requiring emergency repairs and necessitating immediate hazardous material abatement and the displacement of multiple Members of Congress and their staff.

We are at a critical point with Rayburn. Continued reliance on reactive maintenance is not cost-effective, exposes the facility to escalating risks, and jeopardizes Congressional operations. Timely investment is critical to prevent further deterioration, reduce hazards, keep vital building systems operational, and avoid a catastrophic failure that would impact Members, staff and the public.

#### **5. Workforce Investments and Meeting Mission Requirements**

Our workforce remains our greatest asset and the foundation of the AOC's mission success. A highly skilled, supported and stable workforce ensures effective stewardship of the assets we manage, continuity of operations, and the timely delivery of services to Members, staff and the American public. The agency must ensure it continues to attract and retain a skilled workforce capable of maintaining and preserving the Capitol campus. Our Human Capital Strategy is anchored on three key pillars: attracting top talent through strategic acquisition, enhancing skills through talent development, and fostering a motivated workforce by prioritizing employee engagement and retention. Strategic investment in recruitment, retention and training reduces costly turnover, preserves institutional knowledge, and strengthens operational continuity.

#### **6. Conclusion**

On behalf of the men and women at the AOC, I extend our sincere appreciation to this Committee for your continued support. Your steadfast dedication and partnership in serving the American people are essential to our daily operations and the successful fulfillment of our mission. Chairman Steil, Ranking Member Morelle, and Members of the Committee, thank you for your time and support.