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Ranking Member Joe Morelle (NY-25)
Committee on House Administration
“Oversight of the Architect of the Capitol:
Addressing Past Lessons, Present Projects, and Future Challenges”
June 3, 2026, at 10:15 a.m. ET
Opening Statement, as prepared for delivery

“Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you to our witness, Architect of the Capitol Tom Austin, for being here today – and for the work you and your team perform 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

“The Architect of the Capitol employs roughly 2,500 people, including maintenance crews, skilled tradespeople, Capitol tour guides, and countless other professionals responsible for keeping this campus’s eighteen million square feet of facilities and 570 acres of grounds operating safely and effectively.

“Unfortunately, like many legislative branch agencies, the AOC is continually asked to do more with less.

“And while the agency’s dedicated workforce has made a herculean effort to keep campus running, it has done so on a budget that has not kept pace with the work.

“The men and women of the AOC make it possible for the rest of us to do our jobs, and they deserve our support.

“In the last year alone, the team responsible for the House Office Buildings—buildings like the one we’re sitting in now—have addressed about 5,000 heating and cooling problems, more than 500 pipe leaks, and nearly 200 elevator failures, all while managing a backlog of dozens of unfunded repair projects.

“I’ve spoken often about how we’ve weakened Congress’s Article One capacity by failing to adequately invest in the institution.

“There may be no issue that better illustrates this failure than what’s happening with the Rayburn House Office Building.

“Even before the current Architect’s appointment, the agency had been sounding the alarm about Rayburn’s deteriorating infrastructure.

“I want to thank the Architect for the many briefings he has provided to the Members and staff of this Committee, the Appropriations Committee, Leadership, and other stakeholders.

“The message we’ve heard has been consistent and unequivocal: absent a comprehensive renovation, the Rayburn Building faces what the Architect himself has described as a risk of “catastrophic systems failure.”

“And this is not some distant, hypothetical concern.

“Since 2023 alone, Rayburn has experienced 25 major water leaks resulting in millions of dollars in repair costs and the displacement of Members and staff from their offices for months at a time. As I wrote in my recent [letter](#) to the Speaker, every year we delay this project, the cost only grows.

“The concern over Rayburn is not limited to the AOC. In 2020, an independent panel concluded that Rayburn’s critical systems were already at risk of imminent failure.

“Unless Congress acts, we will continue pouring millions of taxpayer dollars into temporary fixes instead of addressing the underlying problem responsibly and strategically.

“To that end, the first major step in the Rayburn renovation will be the design and construction “swing space” to accommodate displaced Member, committee, and support offices.

“To determine the most viable option, the Architect conducted a study that concluded the most cost-effective solution would be to build a new House office building. That building could later serve as swing space for an eventual Longworth renovation, and ultimately become a permanent part of the Capitol campus.

“So, it was deeply disappointing to see the Appropriations Committee report a bill that fails to provide even a single dollar for swing space design, despite the agency’s request. The bill also fails to fund a new parking structure that the AOC has identified as another critical enabling project necessary to support the renovation.

“And while the bill *does* provide limited funding for design of the renovated Rayburn building itself, that work cannot meaningfully begin until the agency has clarity on what swing space and additional infrastructure will be available.

“Allowing the buildings we work in deteriorate around us is, sadly, a fitting illustration of the broader failure to strengthen and sustain Article One that has come to define this Congress.

“We owe it to the people who work in and visit these buildings, including the AOC employees who keep them standing, to plan and fund this work before a failure forces our hand.

“And we owe it to the American people.

“We cannot effectively carry out the duties they elected us to perform in buildings that are, to quote the Architect once again, at risk of ‘catastrophic systems failure.’

“I look forward to hearing from the Architect on these issues and others, including physical security, the Capitol Visitor Center, and the impact of the planned decommissioning of a GSA steam plant that services several buildings on campus.

“With that, I again thank Mr. Austin for being here. I look forward to our discussion, and I yield back.”

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