

**NOMINATION HEARING OF JAMES BRETT
BLANTON FOR ARCHITECT OF THE CAPITOL**

HEARING
BEFORE THE
**COMMITTEE ON RULES AND
ADMINISTRATION**
UNITED STATES SENATE
ONE HUNDRED SIXTEENTH CONGRESS
FIRST SESSION

DECEMBER 12, 2019

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FIRST SESSION

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NOMINATION HEARING OF JAMES BRETT BLANTON FOR ARCHITECT OF THE CAPITOL

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2019

UNITED STATES SENATE
COMMITTEE ON RULES AND ADMINISTRATION

Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10 a.m., in Room 301, Russell Senate Office Building, Hon. Roy Blunt, Chairman of the Committee, presiding.

Present: Senators Blunt and Fischer.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HONORABLE ROY BLUNT, CHAIRMAN, A U.S. SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF MISSOURI

Chairman BLUNT. The Committee on Rules and Administration will come to order. Good morning. I think some of my colleagues will be attending as the hearing progresses, but I am certainly glad to be here with Brett Blanton, the President's nominee to be the Architect of the Capitol. Also pleased to see Tom Carroll here who has stepped in as the Acting Architect with lots of big projects and frankly waiting for the permanent Architect to be chosen. Tom has been doing a lot of those projects without the kind of support that the Architect would normally have. So Tom, thanks for your leadership and stepping up.

Before you begin your remarks, Mr. Blanton, I would like to extend my congratulations to you on this nomination and recognize your family, your wife Michelle, your daughters Reilly and Kiran, your mom Ann, and grandpa Steve. My staff and I had the privilege of meeting with a number of people on this topic, but when we met with Mr. Blanton, it was obvious that his background and his credentials were a great match for this job.

So, glad to see the President make this decision. Mr. Blanton is a licensed professional engineer. He received his Bachelor's degree in Aeronautical Engineering from the U.S. Naval Academy, his Master's degree in Ocean Engineering from Virginia Tech. He is a third-generation naval officer, having spent 21 years in the Navy where he received the Bronze Star for his service in Iraq. Mr. Blanton's last position in the Navy was the Acting Chief Engineer for the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington, DC. Mr. Blanton, thanks for your military service. He also now brings to this position over 25 years of executive experience, and facilities operations and construction management.

He is currently the Deputy Vice President for the Metropolitan Washington Airport Authority, where he is implementing a \$1.5 billion long-term strategic capital plan for both the Dulles and

Reagan National Airports. I think Mr. Blanton has also played a critical role in the Silver Line Metro extension to Dulles. If the Senate confirms you, Mr. Blanton, I imagine your current employer will miss your skills very much, but we look forward to having them here. It is a big job.

First Architect of the Capitol was named by George Washington. The current Architect will have an agency that manages a budget of over \$800 million with 12 jurisdictions, including the Capitol building and grounds, the Senate and House office buildings, the Library of Congress, the Supreme Court, the Botanical Gardens, and other facilities. 2,300 people ranging from architects and engineers to hourly service workers are part of that job and it truly is a big job. 18.4 million square feet of facilities, 570 acres of grounds, thousands of works of art, many monuments that make up the historic Capitol collection and complex, have over 3 million visitors a year come to the Capitol, and frankly, the next Architect the Capitol will inherit an agency experiencing a number of stresses.

As I mentioned before, there are a significant number of executive leadership positions that need to be filled, but for somebody taking this job, I think that is more of an opportunity than a challenge. These buildings have been here a while. So the aging nature of the architecture and the infrastructure are both a challenge. We have got projects going on both sides of the Capitol, House and Senate. They are good examples of what a big challenge that can be, but I am confident with your abilities you are going to be able to successfully lead this agency. I look forward to hearing your thoughts on the challenges that may arise, and I will say short of some huge and unanticipated problem in this hearing today, I hope we can move this nomination very quickly.

So, Mr. Blanton, we have your written statement in the record, but if you would like to share some of the thoughts in that statement or the statement itself with us, let us take about 5 minutes for that.

OPENING STATEMENT OF JAMES BRETT BLANTON, TO BE THE ARCHITECT OF THE CAPITOL

Mr. BLANTON. Thank you, Chairman Blunt, Senator Fischer, and other members of the committee. I will give you an abridged version of my opening statement for the sake of time. I am honored to appear before you as President Trump's nominee to become the 12th Architect of the Capitol. Before I begin, I would like to recognize and thank my loving wife Michelle, my daughters Reilly and Kiran, Alexis our eldest daughter lives in Ohio and could not attend in such short notice.

I would like to also thank Ann, my mother, and grandpa Steve who are in attendance. Without the strong support and moral guidance of my family, I would not be where I am today. Finally, I would like to thank you and your staff for the comprehensive and thorough bipartisan, bicameral congressional commission, which yielded several highly qualified candidates for the President to select a nominee. I am truly honored to be that nominee.

Chairman, as you allude to, the origins of the Architect of the Capitol are rooted in the very history of our representative republic in the city of Washington, DC. President George Washington ap-

pointed three commissioners to provide a suitable building to accommodate Congress. The commissioners hired Pierre L'Enfant to lay out the capital city and staged a competition for the design of the Capitol itself.

President Washington awarded the Capitol building to Dr. William Thornton for his design to serve as the blueprint for America's Government headquarters. William Thornton is credited as the first Architect of the Capitol, commonly called AOC. The vision of William Thornton has been extended through 10 successors. In fact, the Capitol has been undergoing continued construction, with exception of a small period of time during the 1800's, since George Washington laid the cornerstone in 1793.

Today, AOC employees work everyday to serve Congress and the Supreme Court, preserve America's Capitol, and inspire memorable experiences for those who visit the building and grounds. This enormous responsibility of these duties is not lost on me. The AOC staff is responsible to the U.S. Congress for the maintenance, operation, development, and preservation of 18.4 million square feet of facilities, 570 acres of grounds, and thousands of works of art. I bring a unique background to the Architect of the Capitol.

I consider myself a leader of change with extensive experience in facilities operations and construction management in highly visible and public environments. My experience includes developing long-term master planning, project planning, sustainable design, building maintenance, physical security management, and financial management. I pride myself with the ability to simultaneously develop short-term and long-term capital funding priorities across multiple locations.

Currently at the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority, I am leading a \$1.5 billion capital planning and design construction program at two of the most architecturally significant facilities in the greater Washington, DC area, the Eero Saarinen designed terminal at Dulles International Airport, and the Cesar Pelli designed terminal at Reagan National. Major construction projects at airports involve many of the same risks and challenges experienced on the Capitol campus. The work must occur while minimizing disruption to tenants, occupants, and the traveling public.

Additionally, safety and health concerns are paramount while executing construction at locations that serve approximately 50 million passengers a year. I am also a retired civil engineer corps officer who oversaw some of the largest infrastructure projects undertaken by the Department of Navy. I served as an adviser to two Senate confirmed political appointees and two administrations of both political parties and worked to formulate and manage Navy and Marine Corps energy, installation, and environment policies. I was a federal acquisition professional with the highest contracting warrant. I am a registered professional engineer and a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy.

My military career offered me diverse leadership experiences ranging from U.S. and overseas locations to serving in combat zones, Navy headquarters, and the joint staff. I fully realize trade organizations and magazines have taken public opinion that the Architect of Capitol must be an architect. I respectfully disagree.

The Architect of the Capitol needs to be a strong, transformational leader who has experience managing historical facilities in a customer service environment. It requires a leader who will usher in a new era of transparency and accountability to effectively maintain and preserve the universally recognized symbol of western democracy in the world. I am that leader. The Office of the Architect of the Capitol has a well-deserved reputation of employing some of the Nation's best engineers, architects, historical preservationists, and skilled trades personnel.

However, in recent years, there have been some leadership challenges which contribute to difficulty attracting and retaining a skilled and engaged workforce. In order to maintain these iconic facilities on the Capitol campus, we must recruit, train, and retain the best possible workforce.

Unfortunately the AOC's glassdoor.com rating, which is a website many professionals use to determine when they are seeking employment, is a neighborhood of 2 out of 5 stars. We can do better. As such, I will implement a human capital strategy to address the changing workforce, ensure succession planning, and train or retain our top talent.

Additionally, I will have a zero tolerance policy for harassment, discrimination, and unethical behavior. We cannot expect to attract the Nation's top workforce without adapting and changing our culture. Changing the culture of any large organization takes time but change must begin at the top, and it must begin by implementing a new mandate of transparency, accountability, and responsiveness.

The Office of the Architect of the Capitol must better partner with the members and staff of the Senate, House, and Supreme Court. Together, we all have the same goal, maintaining and preserving the Capitol campus for generations to come. I plan to usher a new era of stewardship. I see our first opportunity to implement the new standards of transparency, accountability, and responsiveness to be the planning for the 2021 Inauguration.

The Inauguration is a unique and important occurrence. The world will be watching, so we must all work together to ensure the next Inauguration is exceptionally successful.

I was happy to read that the AOC earned its 15th consecutive unmodified, or clean, audit opinion on the financial statements and received its eight consecutive Certificate of Excellence in Accountability from the Association of Government Accounts. These are no small accomplishments. However, it is my understanding that the Capitol has a \$1.77 billion maintenance backlog as of September 30th.

Although Congress and the Office of the Architect of the Capitol have a mandate to preserve our seat of representative republic for future generations, it is unrealistic to think that we can afford to immediately appropriate funding to retire this backlog. I also understand that the AOC has a robust condition assessment program that meticulously categorizes the material state of each facility.

I plan to utilize this existing condition assessment program as the backbone of a comprehensive enterprise asset management program that will enable us to optimize projects that produce the highest rate of return for facility longevity. Additionally, this will allow

us to rank projects against other projects to determine which projects will actually have the best results.

Finally, when it comes to projects undertaken by the AOC, I plan to have a constant channel of communication between members and their staffs. As I allude to in my full statement, the more information you and your team know, the less time I will spend reacting to questions and concerns, thus allowing me to focus on the actions and issues that will transform the management of the Office of the Architect of the Capitol.

I believe that the Office of the Architect of the Capitol has all the elements to succeed in its mission to serve Congress, the Supreme Court, preserve America's Capitol, and inspire the memorial experiences of all who visit the Capitol campus. Should I be confirmed, I will build upon the enormous legacy of my 11 predecessors and usher in a new era of positive change to the organization. I see the Members of Congress, the oversight committees, your staff, and the Architect as partners in preserving the most iconic symbols of western democracy in the world.

Chairman BLUNT and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I welcome any questions you may have.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Blanton was submitted for the record.]

Chairman BLUNT. Well, thank you, Mr. Blanton. Let's start with your commitment on transparency and responsiveness. The first question, just a yes or no question. If confirmed, do you commit to answer every question and provide all information requested by this committee and its staff and to comply as soon as possible?

Mr. BLANTON. Yes.

Chairman BLUNT. The comments—I thought you made some significant comments in your statement. That will of course be available to all of the Members. The last Architect of the Capitol served only 8 years of the 10-year term. If confirmed, do you plan to serve the full 10-year term as Architect of the Capitol?

Mr. BLANTON. I do. Regarding a necessity health or other emergencies, which would cause me to resign.

Chairman BLUNT. How do you plan to recruit, select, and retain members of your executive leadership team?

Mr. BLANTON. So in my 25 years experience, I have developed a vast network of professionals that I trust, they are truly honorable and ethical people. I will use my social network as well as on some of the key positions, I am going to want to have headhunters involved so we can go nationwide and get the best talent possible. Part of my plan is that when we change our culture, we are going to attract people because there are going to be lines of people waiting who want to come here.

Chairman BLUNT. Well, I hope that is the case. In your comments, I think it was obvious you understand the uniqueness of this job and in so many ways there is only one like it. I was interested in your comments. I mentioned 3 million visitors, you mentioned 50 million passengers. You may be one of the few people that could sit at that table and think, well, 3 million, surely you can handle 3 million if at those two airports you have handled 50 million passengers.

But, we do want people who come to this building from our country and from all over the world. There is no Capitol anywhere in the world as open and as accessible as this one. It is a significant example of who we are. It is a significant part of who we are and being sure that that experience works in the way that American citizens would expect it to work and that others would be impressed that it worked that way I think is really important. Each of the agencies 12 jurisdictions has authority to implement and discipline—well, to implement discipline and other human resource policies. This can create inconsistency and disparate treatment.

What do you think as you look at 12 entities with the kind of flexibility that they had on personnel issues as you look at that particular problem?

Mr. BLANTON. Coming from DOD, it is not too uncommon to have organizations that execute the H.R. policies. However, what you have, and I see that from my initial review, the organization in our H.R. policies is that—we need to centralize the policies and procedures so there is consistency amongst the organizations. The jurisdiction should be able to execute them, but they should be centralized so there is consistency among each one of the jurisdictions.

Chairman BLUNT. I think that has been one of our concerns in this committee that you didn't have from agency to agency the same kind of well understood policies and even people that would transfer from one unit to the other might not know what the overall expectations were. So, I think that is good. I noticed also in your comments you expressed you have zero tolerance for discrimination and harassment. How would you address any incidents of discrimination or harassment in the agency?

Mr. BLANTON. Swiftly, would be the first thing. Then also have to make sure our policies have set procedures so that they can be addressed and the person who is the victim has protections as well as the person who has the complaint against them has a due process to determine whether there is actually a justified complaint or not. Since I have not been in the seat yet, I haven't reviewed all of our policies, but I will say it is going to be swift and it will be fair.

Chairman BLUNT. What role do you think diversity plays in creating an effective agency, particularly in agency, particularly an agency like this one?

Mr. BLANTON. So for me, it is more of a diversity of thought, and that comes from having people of different ethnic backgrounds, religious backgrounds, geographic and socioeconomic backgrounds. They bring in a new amount of thought. So I prioritize the different opinions of different groups as when it comes to being a thought leader.

Chairman BLUNT. You mentioned the budget and you were pleased that the audits showed that, financially, the audits showed a positive financial audit. What would you do to ensure stewardship and accountability over this huge budget that you are going to be asked to be responsible for?

Mr. BLANTON. So I view that as two questions. The first question being the accountability. It shows, in the audits, that the accountability exists because we could determine where the funds are spent and what they were spent on. Stewardship is the second

question that I think is of much greater importance because it would allow us to show, are we doing the best with the money that is appropriated as opposed to just spending it and knowing where we spent it.

I do say, I will have to review all of our policies, but when it comes down to project planning and comes down to the execution of it, I think strict project controls and strict change management is essential to doing the best stewardship of our money. Also when it touches on the accountability and the responsiveness to the committees. I want the committees and the staff members to know what changes will occur and what the consequences of these changes will be so that they can, themselves, judge what will happen should a change occur to a project.

Chairman BLUNT. Good. The process of nomination by the President, but nominating from a group of people recommended by the Congress, this is the Architect of the Capitol, and there is a difference on the two ends of the street here of who is responsible for what. I think the Chairman of House Administration and I would both view that you work for the Congress. You've got to be confirmed by the Congress, you were recommended by the Congress.

I don't know that that requires any kind of response from your part, but whenever you get consultation and advice from the Congress, I hope you take that seriously. I would expect we would have at least one hearing a year where you would be here with whatever staff you think you need to have with you to talk about ongoing projects, to talk about the kind of progress you are making on that troublesome backlog of maintenance. I think the Cannon Building, while it is on the other side of the Capitol, is a great example of what happens when backlogs are allowed to buildup and maintenance is allowed to go away and nobody more than the Acting Architect of the Capitol could express to us today what a challenge that has been.

But this job, the Architect of the Capitol is the Architect that works at the direction and to report to the Congress. Back to the very first question I asked, I just want to be sure as we move through this today that there is no uncertainty on that issue.

The Architect of the Capitol has in law some substantial leeway, but that leeway should really only be used if you are going to have the kind of relationships you want to have, with explaining why you are using it and consultation and all the things you are talking about in terms of stewardship, in terms of a policy that looks for diversity, that insists that harassment not be part of the workplace, looks for consistency. I think all good.

What is your view of how quickly you want to begin to look at the master plan, to review the current master plan, and come up with your own sense with your staff that you will soon be responsible for of where that master plan makes sense and where it can't possibly be executed and what needs to be added to it?

Mr. BLANTON. So, I would like to review the current master plan pretty quickly within my first 90 days. As far as the next version of the master plan, I would see myself starting with a little different tact. I think you start out first with a vision, and that vision is a collaborative vision. It would be a vision that would between

the Office of the Architect of the Capitol and the members and staff we support.

That then will be transferred into more of what you see as a traditional master plan, which has the projects and how you are going to implement them and how you are going to judge the effectiveness of your execution of it. Then you immediately follow that with the implementation plan which would be a phase plan over multiple years saying these five projects be executed in this sequence, for example. But it all starts initially with a vision and vision is the thing that needs to be shared amongst all of us.

Chairman BLUNT. Yes. Then I think you need to effectively share it with us. You know, this is the oversight committee on the Senate side, but the other committee, the appropriating committee, the Legislative branch and the other appropriating committee that you will need to work with, very important to try to be sure that they are brought into your vision and your priorities. You know, obviously it is always more exciting to build new things than to take care of the things you already have. That is something I am confident you are going to be able to do.

I think the Inspector General relationship has not been what it could be. Talk to me a little about your view of the role and impact of the Inspector General on the agency. I think there has been a feeling the Inspector General worked for the Architect of the Capitol as another instrument of the Architect. That is not really the way it works most other places.

Mr. BLANTON. So I actually feel pretty lucky being in a situation coming as an outsider because I would see myself utilizing the Inspector General as a partner to help me find areas that I would need to focus on. Inspector Generals, in general, have a dual role. They work for the agency and they work for Congress. So I respect that. I have dealt with that throughout my career and I would see myself dealing with the Architect of the Capitol's Inspector General similarly.

Chairman BLUNT. You are prepared to start this job whenever confirmed?

Mr. BLANTON. I have a period, a waiting period, I have to do upon confirmation, so I am targeting mid-January.

Chairman BLUNT. Anything you want to add?

Mr. BLANTON. Other than it has been my pleasure, sir, and I look forward to working with you.

Chairman BLUNT. Well, I want to thank you for joining us today. As I said earlier, I intend to move this nomination quickly. I will be meeting with the full committee probably as early as early next week. They will have some questions that they might submit for the record. If you have questions for the record since we want to deal with this as quickly as we can so we can get you started early next year, please respond quickly to those questions when you get them.

[The information referred to was submitted for the record.]

Chairman BLUNT. Thanks for appearing today. I was pleased to see your family here with you, and hopefully this will all go as well as we need it to because we need you on board and we need the kind of leadership that the President and the Congress both have

believed up till this point that you can provide. I think the Senate when it confirms will verify that one other time. Adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 10:26, the hearing was adjourned.]

APPENDIX MATERIAL SUBMITTED

Statement of James Brett Blanton
Nominee for Architect of the Capitol

Thank you Chairman Blunt, Ranking Member Klobuchar and Members of the committee. I am honored to appear before you as President Trump's nominee to become the 12th Architect of the Capitol. Before I begin, I would like to recognize and thank my loving wife, Michelle, my daughters Reilly and Kiran – Alexis our eldest daughter lives in Ohio and could not attend with such short notice. I would also like to thank my mother Ann and Grampa Steve who are in attendance. Without the strong support and moral guidance of my family, I would not be where I am today. Finally, I would like to thank you and your staffs for the comprehensive and thorough bipartisan, bicameral Congressional commission which yielded several highly qualified candidates for the President to select a nominee. I am truly honored to be that nominee.

The origins of the Architect of the Capitol are rooted in the very history of our Representative Republic and the city of Washington DC. President George Washington appointed three commissioners to provide suitable buildings to accommodate Congress. The commissioners hired Pierre L'Enfant to "lay out the Capitol City" and staged a competition for the design of the Capitol. President Washington awarded the U.S. Capitol Building to Dr. William Thornton for his design to serve as the blueprint of America's government headquarters. William Thornton is credited as the "first Architect of the Capitol", commonly called AOC.

The vision of William Thornton has been extended through ten successors. And, in fact, the Capitol has been undergoing continual construction (with the exception of a small period during the 1800's) since George Washington laid the cornerstone of the U.S. Capitol Building in 1793.

Today, AOC employees work every day to serve Congress and the Supreme Court, preserve America's Capitol and inspire memorable experiences for all who visit the buildings and grounds. The enormous responsibility of these duties is not lost on me. The AOC staff is responsible to the United States Congress for the maintenance, operation, development and preservation of over 18.4 million square feet of facilities, 570 acres of grounds and thousands of works of art within the U.S. Capitol Building, the Senate Office Buildings, House Office Buildings, the Capitol Visitors Center, the Library of Congress, the Supreme Court, the U.S. Botanic Garden and the Capitol Power Plant. The historic buildings managed by the AOC host over five million visitors annually and over 30,000 daily occupants.

My Background

I bring a unique background to the Architect of the Capitol. I consider myself a “leader of change” with extensive executive experience in facilities operations and construction management in highly-visible public environments including long term master planning, project planning, sustainable design, building maintenance, physical security management and financial management. I pride myself with the ability to simultaneously develop short-term and long-range capital funding priorities for facilities across multiple locations.

Currently, at the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority, I am successfully leading a \$1.5 billion Capital Planning, Design and Construction program at two of the most architecturally significant facilities in the Greater Washington DC area, the Eero Saarinen designed Terminal at Dulles International Airport and the Cesar Pelli designed terminal at Reagan National. Major construction projects at active airports involve many of the same risks and challenges experienced on the Capitol Campus. The work must occur while minimizing disruption to the tenants, occupants and the traveling public. Additionally, safety and health concerns are paramount while executing construction at locations that serve approximately 50 million passengers a year.

I am also a retired Navy Civil Corps Officer who oversaw some of the largest infrastructure projects undertaken by the Department of the Navy. I served as an advisor to two Senate confirmed political appointees in two administrations of both political parties and worked to formulate and manage Navy and Marine Corps energy, installation and environment policies relating to construction management; sustainment, restoration and modernization of facilities (including roads, piers, runways, and historic facilities); acquisition; environmental protection, planning, restoration and natural resources conservation; resiliency planning; and Safety and Occupational Health.

I was a Federal Acquisition Professional with the highest contracting warrant. I am a Registered Professional Engineer and a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy. My military career offered me diverse leadership experience ranging from US and overseas installations to service in combat zones, Navy headquarters and the Joint Staff.

I fully realize trade organizations and magazines have taken a public position that the Architect of the Capitol must be an Architect. I respectfully disagree. The Office of the Architect of the Capitol needs a strong, transformational leader who has experience managing historical facilities in a customer service environment. It requires a leader who will usher in a new era of transparency and accountability to effectively maintain and preserve the universally recognized symbol of Western Representative Democracy. I am that leader.

Challenges Facing the Architect of the Capitol

Human Capital

The Office of the Architect of the Capitol has a well-deserved reputation of employing the some of the Nation's best Engineers, Architects, Historic Preservationists and skilled trades personnel. However, in recent years, there have been some leadership challenges which contribute to difficulty attracting and retaining a skilled and engaged workforce. In order to maintain the iconic facilities of the Capitol Campus, we must recruit, train and retain the best possible workforce. Unfortunately, the AOC's glassdoor.com rating (a website utilized by many professionals seeking employment) is in the neighborhood of two out of five stars. We can do better. As such, I will implement a Human Capital Strategy to address the changing workforce, ensure succession planning and train or retain our top talent. Additionally, I will have a zero tolerance policy for harassment, discrimination or unethical behavior. We cannot expect to attract the Nation's top workforce without adapting and changing our culture.

Culture Change: Transparency, Accountability and Responsiveness

Changing the culture of any large organization takes time, but any change must begin at the top and must begin by implementing a new mandate of transparency, accountability and responsiveness. The Office of the Architect of the Capitol must better partner with the Members and staff of the Senate, House and Supreme Court. Together, we all have the same goal of maintaining the Capitol Campus for generations to come. I plan to usher in this new era of stewardship. Selfishly, I view increased transparency, accountability and responsiveness as a significant benefit for me. The more you and your staff know about our projects, operations and issues, the less I will need to spend time answering inquiries about information I feel you should already have in order to perform your oversight responsibilities. I see our first opportunity to implement the new standards of transparency, accountability and responsiveness will be the planning for the 2021 Inauguration. The Inauguration is a unique and important occurrence. The world will be watching, so we ALL must work together to ensure the next Inauguration is exceptionally successful.

Fiscal Challenges

I was happy to read that the AOC earned its 15th consecutive unmodified (clean) audit opinion on the financial statements and received its eight consecutive Certificate of Excellence in Accountability Reporting award from the Association of Government Accounts. These are no small accomplishments.

However, it is my understanding that the Capitol has a \$1.77 Billion maintenance backlog as of September 30, 2019. Although Congress and the Office of the Architect of the Capitol have a mandate to preserve the seat of our Representative Republic for future generations, it is unrealistic to think that we can afford to immediately appropriate funding to retire this backlog. I also understand that the AOC has a robust condition assessment program that meticulously categorizes the material state of each facility. I plan to utilize the existing condition assessment program as the backbone of a comprehensive Enterprise Asset Management program that will enable us to optimize projects that produce the highest rate of return for facility longevity. Additionally, a successful Enterprise Asset Management program will enable us to objectively measure a project's outcomes vs other projects to determine which investments yield the best results.

Additionally, the AOC routinely undertakes multiple major construction, renewal and restoration projects concurrently. Successfully managing multiple projects of historical facilities is always a challenge because of the high probability of unforeseen conditions once construction begins. To help mitigate the risk of the unknowns, we will need to better define the scope of each project upfront and utilize a strong project controls or change management program so Congress will fully understand the schedule and cost consequences of proposed changes.

Finally, when it comes to projects undertaken by the AOC, I plan to have a constant channel of communication between members and their staffs. As I alluded to earlier, the more information you and your team know, the less time I will spend reacting to questions and concerns; thus allowing me to focus on issues that will transform the management of the Office of the Architect of the Capitol.

Information Technology Modernization

The Fiscal Year 2019 Performance and Accountability Report indicated that cyber security is a management and performance challenge. Because the nature of cyber security measures and counter-measures are not typically discussed openly in public, I haven't fully digested the details and opportunities for improvement. I will say that I will make modernizing the information technology infrastructure and cyber security a priority. Accordingly, I look forward to briefing you and your staff about recommendations in the future.

Conclusion

I believe that the Office of the Architect of the Capitol has all the elements to succeed in its mission to serve Congress and the Supreme Court, preserve America's Capitol and inspire memorable experiences for all who visit the Capitol Campus.

Should I be confirmed, I will build upon the enormous legacy of my 11 predecessors and usher in a new era of positive change to the organization. I see the Members of Congress, the oversight committees, your staff and the Architect's office as partners in preserving the most iconic symbols of Western Democracy in the world.

Chairman Blunt, Ranking Member Klobuchar, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I welcome any questions you may have.

Senate Committee on Rules and Administration
Architect of the Capitol_Nomination Hearing
December 12, 2019
Questions for the Record
Mr. J. Brett Blanton

Chairman Blunt

General Background Questions

1. Why are you interested in becoming the next Architect of the Capitol?

To answer this question, I must begin with the mission of the Architect of the Capitol: Serve, Preserve and Inspire. The Service portion is most inspiring to me. I have built a career on service; honed my leadership, operations, and construction management skills to lead large organizations in highly public arenas; and become a strategic leader who is exceptionally comfortable communicating with the highest levels of government.

For me, as the 12th Architect of the Capitol, I will maintain the legacy of my 11 predecessors, deliver exceptional customer service, and above all...serve.

2. What motivates you to lead this agency?

I consider the Office of the Architect of the Capitol as having an amazing legacy, but in needing a transformational leader to change the organization. I consider myself a "change agent" and welcome the challenge of changing the AOC into a well-respected, transparent and efficient organization.

3. How would you describe your leadership style, both in the military, private sector, and now in the government sector?

My leadership philosophy can best be described as empowering and inclusive. Although responsibility will always remain with me, I believe in delegating authority to practicable levels within an organization. As such, workforce managers will feel more empowered and take more pride and ownership of their day-to-day job tasks. The results of empowering the workforce include timely facility decisions occurring at an accelerated rate and increased customer service. To achieve a culture where staff feels empowered to make decisions, I routinely publicly praise or reward instances when personnel make decisions that result in exceeding customer quality expectations, cost reductions or complete a task faster than expected.

4. What do you see as the greatest challenges for the AOC as it moves into the next decade, and if confirmed, how would you prioritize those challenges?

As I mentioned in my opening statement, I view changing the culture into one of

transparency, accountability and responsiveness; attracting and retaining a skilled workforce; addressing fiscal issues including project management and the enormous maintenance backlog; and modernizing IT infrastructure as my initial challenges. In general, changing the culture will be most important because the results will cascade into bettering other areas of concern. Obviously, within the first 90 days, I will have to reassess the challenges once I review ongoing plans and projects.

5. How will you communicate your vision to all employees at the agency to secure their buy-in?

As for the personnel issues that have plagued the AOC, I will provide very clear expectations and standards to the executive leadership team. Then hold similar meetings with all managers where I will express the same expectations. I will warn the managers that I plan to go to the field and ask the workforce about the policies, expectations and standards. If they don't know about them, I will hold managers and the executive leaders accountable.

I plan a more inclusive agenda by setting metrics for project management and execution, Master Planning, IT modernization, etc. to encourage leaders take ownership and feel valued in developing the way ahead.

Stabilizing the AOC Leadership

1. The last Architect of the Capitol served only eight years of a ten-year term. If confirmed, do you plan to serve a full ten-year term as Architect of the Capitol?
What would cause you to end your term prematurely?

I plan to serve my full term unless something unforeseen such as illness, family emergency or financial crises.

2. How do you plan to recruit, select, and retain members of your executive leadership team?

I have developed a vast network of honorable and ethical leaders during my career who I trust. I will weigh upon this network to help recruit vacancies in my executive leadership team. Additionally, I plan to use head-hunter agencies for key positions so we can search for and attract the best possible candidates world-wide. Retention will be a key part of the Human Capital Strategy that was discussed in my opening statement.

3. Currently, each of the agency's twelve jurisdictions has authority to implement discipline and other human resource policies. This can create inconsistency and disparate treatment of employees across the agency. Would you change this delegation of authority to the jurisdictions, and if so, when and how?

Without having the opportunity to review all the issues associated with the AOC's HR policies, I can plan to centralize HR policies and procedures across jurisdictions while

keeping the execution of these policies distributed.

Discrimination and Sexual Harassment in the Agency

1. If confirmed, how will you address any incidents of discrimination and harassment in the agency? How will you address any incidents involving your leadership team?

I have a zero tolerance policy for discrimination, harassment and unethical behavior. I will treat all employees equally regardless of position.

2. How would you create a work place that is free of discrimination and harassment?

I plan to sign my discrimination and harassment policies on my first day in office. I will ensure all within the executive team and jurisdictions fully understand the policies and associated accountability actions. I plan to handle any incident swiftly and fairly.

3. What role does diversity play in creating an effective agency and how will you achieve this?

I believe diversity of thought is essential to any agency. Often, diversity of thought results from inclusion of personnel from various races, ethnicities, creeds, geographic areas and socioeconomic classes. Therefore, I plan to seek out diverse backgrounds to create a more inclusionary agency.

Budget Management and Balancing Congressional Priorities

1. What measures will you take to ensure stewardship and accountability over this budget?

As depicted in the recent Performance and Accountability Report the AOC has earned 15 consecutive unmodified (clean) financial audit opinion and eight consecutive Certificate of Excellence in Accountability Reporting from the Association of Government Accountants. As such, the accountability of funds appropriated is very good. As discussed in my opening statement, there is opportunity to better plan, define scope and manage changes to projects that often lead to cost overruns. I plan to review our current procedures and implement more robust project controls to manage the cost, schedule and scope of projects. Additionally, I plan to ensure Congress fully understands the schedule and cost consequences of proposed changes.

2. How will you prioritize competing demands across the Congress and the agency's jurisdictions?

As mentioned in my opening remarks, once an Enterprise Asset Management (EAM) system is established, the AOC, Congressional members and staff will be able to objectively rate projects against others across jurisdictions. However, in the appropriation process, Congress has the authority to change priorities. With an EAM

system, Congress would at least be able to understand the consequences of changing priorities.

3. What assistance do you need from Congress and from this Committee in accomplishing the mission of the agency?

To fully answer this question, I would need to have been in office long enough to digest exactly what assistance the AOC needs. However, in the meantime, I request no changes in law to tighten or broaden authorities until I can determine needs.

AOC Strategic Plan

1. When and how will you begin the process of reviewing and creating a new master plan?

I plan to review the existing master plan within the first 90 days in office. Shortly thereafter, I would like to begin a visioning process which will serve as the strategic guiding principles for the Strategic Plan. The visioning process is collaborative and includes all stakeholders such as the Office of the Architect of the Capitol, oversight members and staff.

2. What elements do you feel are important in a master plan?

The key strategic blocks of any "master plan" are the Vision, the Master Plan and the Execution Plan. Once the Vision is established, the Master Plan will develop the means to achieve the vision. It includes current inventory, identified gaps, projects to resolve gaps, an explanation of why the projects are necessary, where projects are located and a workforce analysis to execute the Master Plan. The final key element is the Execution Plan which provides the sequence of projects (including enabling projects) and metrics to evaluate successful execution.

3. If confirmed, how will you measure success as Architect of the Capitol?

Subjectively, the relationship between oversight committees and the AOC will be a measure of success. Objectively, I plan to implement a series of metrics and dashboards so I and the oversight committees can review performance in key areas such as agency climate, project management, fiscal management, safety, etc.

The Role of the AOC's Office of the Inspector General

1. What is your view of the role and impact of an Inspector General within an agency?

I view the Inspector General as a productive partnership where we collaboratively seek areas to improve efficiency of the AOC. I fully understand Inspectors General wear two hats; one working directly for the agency and one reporting to Congress.

2. What do you think a productive working relationship with an Inspector General looks like?

As discussed in question 1, a collaborative partnership where we both seek areas for improvement. As someone new to the AOC organization, this relationship will actually be easier than if I had previously spent numerous years working for the AOC.

3. How do you plan to build a working relationship with the AOC's Inspector General?

I plan to emphasize how we both have the same strategic goals. We both want to ensure the office of the AOC is as efficient, effective, accountable and ethical as possible. I have seen no indication that our goals don't align, so I suspect the working relationship will develop quickly and positively.

4. What policies do you plan to implement to ensure the AOC's Office of the Inspector General maintains its independence?

It is my understanding that the Inspector General Act does not apply to the AOC, with the exception that the AOC IG is a member of the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency. However, I plan to follow the spirit of the Act and implement policies outlining so, if they don't currently exist.

Role of Congressional Oversight:

1. How do you view the role of Congress, specifically congressional oversight, in relation to the AOC?

I fully understand Congress' oversight responsibilities. As mentioned in my opening remarks, I believe the oversight committees, Congressional members and the Office of the Architect of the Capitol are partners in preserving the most visible symbols of Western Democracy in the world. I plan to align the AOC organization to this vision of partnership.

2. How important is transparency in communicating with Congress and, if confirmed, what level of transparency can we expect from you?

As I mentioned in my opening remarks, transparency, accountability and responsiveness are of utmost importance to me. I plan to be as openly transparent as possible.

3. If confirmed, will you commit to holding yourself and the agency accountable to Congress?

I plan to be accountable to Congress in its oversight role.

Senator Klobuchar

1. The Architect of the Capitol (AOC) is charged with operating and maintaining the buildings of the Capitol complex committed to their care by Congress. The Architect's duties include the mechanical and structural maintenance of the Capitol, the conservation and care of works of art in the building, the upkeep and improvement of the Capitol grounds, and the arrangement of inaugural and other ceremonies held in the building and grounds.

If confirmed, you will be the 12th Architect of the Capitol. Given the agency's expansive and diverse set of responsibilities, what are your short and long-term priorities? What do you see as the biggest opportunity for improvement, and how can Congress best support you?

As I mentioned in my opening statement, I view changing the culture into one of transparency, accountability and responsiveness; attracting and retaining a skilled workforce; addressing fiscal issues including project management and the enormous maintenance backlog; and modernizing IT infrastructure as my initial priorities. In general, changing the culture will be most important because the results will cascade into bettering other areas of concern. My long-term priorities will be reviewing and updating the AOC's Strategic and Master Plans. Obviously, within the first 90 days, I will have to reassess the challenges once I review ongoing plans and projects. To fully answer the support requirements from Congress, I would need to have been in office long enough to digest exactly what assistance the AOC needs. However, in the meantime, I request no changes in law to tighten or broaden authorities until I can determine needs.

2. In its latest semiannual report to Congress, the AOC's Office of Inspector General (OIG) identified nine management challenges currently facing the agency including: (1) retraining and attracting a skilled and engaged workforce; (2) data quality for monitoring and internal controls structure; (3) management of concurrent construction projects; (4) cyber security; (5) lack of whistleblower protection; (6) property accountability and surplus property disposal; (7) managing user-requested changes; (8) human capital management; and (9) auditability and documentation to support decisions.

What is your plan to address these management challenges?

As discussed in my opening statement, my initial assessment of the Office of the Architect of the Capitol yielded similar challenges. I plan to work with the OIG to fully understand the background data which led to the identified management challenges and determine the appropriate way ahead to resolve them. Based upon what I have read thus far, my priorities and the OIG's seem to be in alignment with respect to these issues.

3. Currently there are several labor unions recognized at the AOC, including: the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), Sheet Metal, Air, Rail,

and Transportation Workers, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, the United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipefitting Industry of the United States and Canada, the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, and the International Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers.

How will you collaborate with labor unions to ensure that AOC employees are treated fairly and well represented and compensated?

I believe labor unions are critical to ensure the workforce is properly trained, skilled and work in a safe environment. I have significant experience working with labor unions and I have found that fairness, honesty and transparency are critical to establishing a productive working relationship. Obviously, unions and the AOC will sometimes have differences in opinions, but if both sides approach negotiations over issues with respect and honesty, these differences can be worked out as equitably as possible.

Senator Cortez Masto

1. Should you be confirmed, what will your top priorities will be as the Architect in the coming months?

As I mentioned in my opening statement, I view changing the culture into one of transparency, accountability and responsiveness; attracting and retaining a skilled workforce; addressing fiscal issues including project management and the enormous maintenance backlog; and modernizing IT infrastructure as my initial priorities.

2. The Architect of the Capitol has made several improvements toward the strategic goal of fostering an innovative and empowered workforce. However, the Office of the Inspector General recently reported that one of the main management challenges facing the AOC has been retaining and attracting skilled and engaged employees.

What are your current and long-term plans to address the AOC's workforce needs?

I view our workforce needs as one of my top priorities. I discussed the need for a comprehensive Human Capital Strategy in my opening remarks. This strategy will address the changing workforce, ensure succession planning and develop, train and retain our top talent. Furthermore, I view changing the culture at the AOC as paramount to attracting the Nation's top workforce. In my opening remarks, I stated, "I will have a zero tolerance policy for harassment, discrimination or unethical behavior. We cannot expect to attract the Nation's top workforce without adapting and changing our culture."

What steps will you be taking to make sure the AOC has a staff that is diverse and inclusive?

I believe diversity of thought is essential to any agency. Often, diversity of thought results from inclusion of personnel from various races, ethnicities, creeds, geographic areas and socioeconomic classes. Therefore, I plan to lead from the front and ensure AOC policies reflect my positions so we can seek out diverse backgrounds to create a more inclusionary agency.

3. Last year, Acting Architect of the Capitol Christine Merdon testified that she directed the Human Capital Management Division to review all of the AOC's current policies to "determine those that need to be updated or withdrawn."

Has that review concluded?

It is my understanding that the review is still ongoing and scheduled to be complete in the summer of 2020.

What are some of the changes you think need to be made to the current policies?

To fully answer this question, I would need to have been in office long enough to have reviewed current policies to see if they are in alignment with my vision for the Office of the Architect of the Capitol. In general, I believe policies should provide clear guidance for the workforce and empower them to perform their duties effectively. Finally, overarching policies should reside at the Office of the Architect and be consistent across jurisdictions.

4. The Architect of the Capitol, like many federal agencies, needs to continue to address the evolving nature of cyber threats. There was recently an evaluation by the OIG of potential vulnerabilities to the AOC's cybersecurity.

Why is it critical that the Architect of the Capitol maintain robust cybersecurity systems?

Cybersecurity is of exceptional importance in any large organization. All too often, we hear about cities, states and businesses that are taken hostage by ransomware, have Personally Identifiable Information (PII) leaked, or financial information stolen. Without robust cybersecurity measures, these incidents could occur at the AOC. Because of the sensitive nature of the buildings maintained by the AOC, cyber vulnerabilities could transform into physical vulnerabilities if the wrong data is "hacked". Finally, there could be a significant cost to recreate lost data, remove viruses or pay individuals who have taken our systems ransom.

Do you think that current AOC cybersecurity programs are adequate to address concerns?

I have not had the opportunity to discuss cybersecurity vulnerabilities with the OIG yet. Obviously, the vulnerabilities were significant enough to warrant inclusion in the Fiscal

Year 2019 Performance and Accountability Report. Once in office, I plan to review the findings develop a plan to modernize our IT infrastructure.

