

DESIGNATION OF GREAT HALL OF THE CAPITOL VISITOR
CENTER AS EMANCIPATION HALL

NOVEMBER 8, 2007.—Referred to the House Calendar and ordered to be printed

Mr. OBERSTAR, from the Committee on Transportation and
Infrastructure, submitted the following

R E P O R T

together with

MINORITY VIEWS

[To accompany H.R. 3315]

[Including cost estimate of the Congressional Budget Office]

The Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure to whom was referred the bill (H.R. 3315) to provide that the great hall of the Capitol Visitor Center shall be known as Emancipation Hall, having considered the same, report favorably thereon without amendment and recommend that the bill do pass.

PURPOSE OF THE LEGISLATION

H.R. 3315 designates the great hall of the Capitol Visitor Center as “Emancipation Hall”.

BACKGROUND AND NEED FOR LEGISLATION

The great hall is located in the new Capitol Visitor Center (“CVC”), which is the most recent and largest addition to the U.S. Capitol in its 212-year history. The CVC, expected to be completed in the fall of 2008, will host more than three million people who visit the U.S. Capitol each year.

The great hall will include information and ticketing desks, and provide an area where Americans and visitors can gather to take in scenic views of the U.S. Capitol or prepare to tour the 580,000-square foot Visitor Center. The great hall will also serve as a central gathering space in the CVC. The great hall encompasses 20,000 square feet and its dimensions are 100 feet by 200 feet, with

a ceiling height of 35 feet. There will be statues from Statuary Hall on display throughout the great hall. The plaster model of the Statue of Freedom from the Senate Russell building will be featured in the cellar rotunda. The wall and column stone in the great hall is sandstone from Pennsylvania. The floor stone is marble from Tennessee and dolomite from Wisconsin. The black granite in the water features of the great hall is from California.

H.R. 3315 designates the great hall of the Capitol Visitor Center as “Emancipation Hall”, acknowledging the work of slave laborers who helped build the United States Capitol.

In 2004, Congress directed the Architect of the Capitol to study and report on the history and contributions of slave laborers in the construction of the U.S. Capitol. The 2005 report, entitled “History of Slave Laborers in the Construction of the United States Capitol”, examined the efforts of slaves to help build the Capitol, other Federal buildings, and the White House, which at the time was known as the President’s House. Although the record was incomplete because of limited documentation of slave labor, the evidence available and historical context in the report provided several indications that slaves and free African Americans played a significant role in building the physical symbols of the United States.

The U.S. Capitol was constructed during a time when the Potomac region’s population was sparse, but the concentration of slave laborers was the highest in the nation. Slave labor was an integral component of the region’s workforce. Slave labor was utilized in all aspects of construction of the Capitol and slaves often worked alongside free blacks and whites in the areas of carpentry, masonry, carting, and painting. Many of the products of slave labor are still visible in the Capitol buildings today and they serve as a reminder of the significant and undeniable contribution that these individuals made to our nation.

In 2005, the Slave Laborers Task Force was established to study and recognize the contributions of enslaved African Americans in building the U.S. Capitol. On November 7, 2007, the Slave Laborers Task Force, chaired by Representative John Lewis, specifically recommended that the great hall of the Capitol Visitor Center be designated as “Emancipation Hall”.

Designating the great hall of the CVC as Emancipation Hall will also eliminate any confusion with the Great Hall of the Library of Congress (“LOC”). The Library of Congress’ Great Hall is located in the Thomas Jefferson Building. The Jefferson Building was completed in 1897 and was built to serve as the American national library but also as an American rival to the grandeur of European libraries. The LOC Thomas Jefferson Building’s Great Hall leads into the central reading room. The LOC Great Hall has, at times, displayed the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States before these documents were transferred to the National Archives in 1952. The CVC will include a connection to the Thomas Jefferson Building, making it important to distinguish between the two open public spaces of the great hall of the CVC and the Library of Congress’ Great Hall.

H.R. 3315 honors the slaves who worked tirelessly to help build the United States Capitol.

SUMMARY OF THE LEGISLATION

Section 1. Designation of great hall of Capitol Visitor Center as Emancipation Hall

Section 1 of the bill designates the great hall of the Capitol Visitor Center as “Emancipation Hall”, and any reference to the great hall in any law, rule, or regulation shall be deemed to be a reference to Emancipation Hall.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY AND COMMITTEE CONSIDERATION

On August 2, 2007, Representative Zach Wamp introduced H.R. 3315.

On September 25, 2007, the Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management held a hearing on H.R. 3315. Prior to the introduction of H.R. 3315, the Subcommittee held a hearing on June 8, 2007, entitled “What Visitors Can Expect at the Capitol Visitor Center: Transportation, Access, Security, and Visuals”.

On October 30, 2007, the Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management met to consider H.R. 3315 and favorably recommended the bill to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure.

On October 31, 2007, the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure met in open session to consider H.R. 3315. The Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure ordered the bill reported favorably to the House by voice vote with a quorum present.

RECORD VOTES

Clause 3(b) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives requires each committee report to include the total number of votes cast for and against on each record vote on a motion to report and on any amendment offered to the measure or matter, and the names of those members voting for and against. There were no recorded votes taken in connection with ordering H.R. 3315 reported. A motion to order H.R. 3315 reported favorably to the House was agreed to by voice vote with a quorum present.

COMMITTEE OVERSIGHT FINDINGS

With respect to the requirements of clause 3(c)(1) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, the Committee’s oversight findings and recommendations are reflected in this report.

COST OF LEGISLATION

Clause 3(c)(2) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives does not apply where a cost estimate and comparison prepared by the Director of the Congressional Budget Office under section 402 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974 has been timely submitted prior to the filing of the report and is included in the report. Such a cost estimate is included in this report.

COMPLIANCE WITH HOUSE RULE XIII

1. With respect to the requirement of clause 3(c)(2) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, and section 308(a) of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974, the Committee references

the report of the Congressional Budget Office included in the report.

2. With respect to the requirement of clause 3(c)(4) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, the performance goal and objective of this legislation is to designate the great hall in the U.S. Capitol Visitor Center as “Emancipation Hall”.

3. With respect to the requirement of clause 3(c)(3) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives and section 402 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974, the Committee has received the enclosed cost estimate for H.R. 3315 from the Director of the Congressional Budget Office:

U.S. CONGRESS,
CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE,
Washington, DC, November 1, 2007.

Hon. JAMES L. OBERSTAR,
*Chairman, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure,
House of Representatives, Washington, DC.*

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: The Congressional Budget Office has reviewed the following bills as ordered reported by the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure on October 31, 2007:

- H.R. 3712, a bill to designate the United States courthouse located at 1716 Spielbusch Avenue in Toledo, Ohio, as the “James M. Ashley and Thomas W.L. Ashley United States Courthouse”; and
- H.R. 3315, a bill to provide that the great hall of the Capitol Visitor Center shall be known as “Emancipation Hall.”

CBO estimates that enactment of these bills would have no significant impact on the federal budget and would not affect direct spending or revenues. These bills contain no intergovernmental or private-sector mandates as defined in the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act and would impose no costs on state, local, or tribal governments. If you wish further details on this estimate, we will be pleased to provide them. The CBO staff contact is Matthew Pickford.

Sincerely,

ROBERT A. SUNSHINE
(For Peter R. Orszag, Director).

COMPLIANCE WITH HOUSE RULE XXI

Pursuant to clause 9 of rule XXI of the Rules of the House of Representatives, H.R. 3315 does not contain any congressional earmarks, limited tax benefits, or limited tariff benefits as defined in clause 9(d), 9(e), or 9(f) of rule XXI of the Rules of the House of Representatives.

CONSTITUTIONAL AUTHORITY STATEMENT

Pursuant to clause 3(d)(1) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, committee reports on a bill or joint resolution of a public character shall include a statement citing the specific powers granted to the Congress in the Constitution to enact the measure. The Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure finds that Congress has the authority to enact this measure pursuant to its powers granted under article I, section 8 of the Constitution.

FEDERAL MANDATES STATEMENT

The Committee adopts as its own the estimate of Federal mandates prepared by the Director of the Congressional Budget Office pursuant to section 423 of the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act (Public Law 104-4).

PREEMPTION CLARIFICATION

Section 423 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974 requires the report of any Committee on a bill or joint resolution to include a statement on the extent to which the bill or joint resolution is intended to preempt state, local, or tribal law. The Committee states that H.R. 3315 does not preempt any state, local, or tribal law.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE STATEMENT

No advisory committees within the meaning of section 5(b) of the Federal Advisory Committee Act are created by this legislation.

APPLICABILITY TO THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

The Committee finds that the legislation does not relate to the terms and conditions of employment or access to public services or accommodations within the meaning of section 102(b)(3) of the Congressional Accountability Act (Public Law 104-1).

CHANGES IN EXISTING LAW MADE BY THE BILL, AS REPORTED

H.R. 3315 makes no changes to existing law.

MINORITY VIEWS

I was pleased to offer the motion to report H.R. 3315 favorably from the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure because I support recognizing emancipation and honoring the contributions of slaves in the construction of the Capitol. However, as I discussed in the subcommittee hearing and full committee markup, I have concerns about renaming the Great Hall of the Capitol Visitor Center. Throughout the history of the Capitol, none of the monumental spaces, such as the House and Senate chambers or the Rotunda, have been named after specific individuals or events in history. Instead, these great spaces of the Capitol have long been called by their functional names. By doing so, all people regardless of their race, ethnic heritage, culture, or human travails are equally recognized.

These spaces are dramatic because of their physical settings and the unique historical events that took place within their walls. Similarly, the Great Hall of the Capitol Visitor Center will become a monumental space with its own unique history; and just as those spaces have not been named, I believe the Great Hall should be reserved and left to honor all Americans.

While I do not believe it is appropriate to rename the Great Hall, I do believe that it is important for Congress to acknowledge and honor the contributions slaves made to the Capitol. In the hearing held by the Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management and again in the full committee markup of this legislation, I suggested that other spaces could better acknowledge emancipation and honor the slaves that helped build the Capitol.

For example, the exhibition hall will provide an important historical context to the name Emancipation Hall and allow visitors to learn about and pay tribute to emancipation. One of the first recommendations I made as a member of the Capitol Preservation Commission was to create a first class museum space within the CVC. I proposed a museum quality space so we could exhibit some of the tremendous artifacts—like the Emancipation Proclamation—which are rarely viewed by the public.

The exhibition hall will be 16,500 square feet, a large space that would not only honor those who built the Capitol, but provide information about their contributions to American history. The exhibition hall will display the Emancipation Proclamation and prominently house the catafalque that was built to support the casket of Abraham Lincoln—the Great Emancipator—while the president's body lay in state in the Rotunda. This hall will contain permanent exhibits on the Constitution and the post-Civil War amendments proposed by Congress and ratified by the states to abolish slavery, to guarantee equal protection under the law, and to ensure the right to vote.

This beautiful hall will have strong historical and contextual links to emancipation. It will be the primary venue for acknowledging and commemorating the slaves who helped build the Capitol and the country. It will help deepen the understanding of our Nation's long struggle with slavery and its ultimate abolition for all who visit here. For all of these reasons, I would suggest we name this area of the Visitor Center Emancipation Hall.

A second space I proposed naming Emancipation Hall is the congressional auditorium. While it does not have the strong links to emancipation as the exhibition hall, it is the most significant functional space in the facility, a place where leaders will gather to discuss important ideas of their time. The auditorium is a grand space that is being designed to serve as an alternative House Chamber. Except for the current House and Senate Chambers, no other venue in the Capitol has such an important purpose. The name Emancipation Hall would serve as a valuable reminder of courage, leadership, and our unique commitment to advance the cause of human freedom and fulfill the promise of the Declaration of Independence and Constitution. As such, I believe it would be appropriate and fitting to name the facility Emancipation Hall.

In sum, I believe there are more appropriate areas in the Capitol Visitor Center to name Emancipation Hall. Additionally, we have a tradition of leaving the monumental spaces of the Capitol unnamed. As a monumental space in, and an introduction to, the Capitol, the Great Hall should retain its current functional name like the other great spaces within the Capitol.

JOHN L. MICA.

