

By Reps. Earl Blumenauer and Phil English,  
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While the news today is saturated with the latest coverage of the 2008 presidential elections, another prominent position in Washington, D.C., is about to be filled quietly and behind the scenes.

Members of an exclusive selection commission have begun interviewing candidates to serve as Architect of the Capitol, a position that carries with it a 10-year term and enormous responsibility. While it has been suggested by some that the only criterion for nominees is that they have experience in managing large facilities, we consider this to be shortsighted and potentially disastrous.

In our view, the Architect of the Capitol should be a trained, skilled and preferably licensed professional architect who commands the respect and confidence necessary to lead the office in making the critical decisions that affect the working and visiting conditions of the tens of thousands of people who come to the Capitol complex each day. Facilities management skills alone will not ensure the unique historical structure of the Capitol and the surrounding buildings and grounds are properly cared for. Architectural training and experience will provide the background in functionality, historic preservation and security necessary to address the challenges of the Capitol complex.

Over the next 10 years, the Architect of the Capitol will be called upon to manage a nearly 15 million-square-foot campus, oversee major renovations to existing historic structures and improve the working conditions, productivity and comfort of legislators and their staffs. The current allocations of work space for legislators were designed almost 50 years ago. In the interim, technology has changed, security concerns have heightened, and the size of Capitol Hill's work force has grown.

Innovative thinking is needed from the Architect's office on how to maximize staff productivity through the use of the space we already have. This space planning should be done in tandem with the Speaker's program to "green" the Capitol complex. All of this must take place while assuring that the business of America's legislature is not disrupted.

The current climate of the Architect of the Capitol's office demands a transformative leader who can provide innovative guidance to secure the trust and cooperation of Members of Congress. Facilities management is a key feature of the Architect's job as well. He or she must be able to lead multidisciplinary teams of professionals while also overseeing complex schedules and tight budgets.

Without question, the campus is one of our country's treasures. Any future renovations or new construction must be undertaken with consideration to the national significance of the structure and its symbolism to our democracy. The decisions made by the next Architect of the Capitol will leave a legacy that will last not just for decades, but centuries to come. To put those decisions in the hands of anyone who is not an architect by profession ignores the very reason the position was created in the first place.

We urge those on the commission to select nominees for submission to the president who possess a combination of three skills: outstanding leadership, rich architectural training and experience and significant expertise in facilities management.

**Rep. Earl Blumenauer is a Democrat from Oregon. Rep. Phil English is a Republican from Pennsylvania.**