



U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

James L. Oberstar
Chairman

Washington, DC 20515

John L. Mica
Ranking Republican Member

David Heymsfeld, Chief of Staff
Ward W. McCarragher, Chief Counsel

September 21, 2007

James W. Coon II, Republican Chief of Staff

SUMMARY OF SUBJECT MATTER

TO: Members of the Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management

FROM: Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management Staff

SUBJECT: Hearing on H.R. 3315, a bill to name the great hall of the Capitol Visitor Center "Emancipation Hall"

PURPOSE OF THE HEARING

On Tuesday, September 25, 2007, at 2:00 p.m., in room 2253 Rayburn House Office Building, the Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management will receive testimony from the sponsors of H.R. 3315, a bill to name the great hall at the Capitol Visitor Center as "Emancipation Hall".

BACKGROUND

More than three million people visit the United States Capitol on an annual basis. In 1991, Congress provided funds for the conceptual design and planning of a Capitol Visitors Center ("CVC"). In 1993, the Capitol Preservation Commission allocated funds to carry the conceptual study into an actual design document.

On July 24, 1998, Russell Weston, Jr. burst through a security checkpoint entrance on the eastern front of the Capitol and opened fire, killing the two Capitol Police officers and wounding several others. Soon after the shooting, Congress appropriated funds for a visitor's center to increase security within the Capitol, and to provide a safer environment for visitors awaiting tours of the Capitol. The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and the subsequent discovery of anthrax in congressional office buildings in October 2001 highlighted concerns regarding the potential vulnerabilities of the Capitol and the need for improved security on Capitol Hill.

The CVC project has been beset with completion delays and cost overruns. Congress initially appropriated \$100 million for the project. However, today, the CVC is expected to cost well over \$500 million.

The new CVC is expected to be completed in the fall of 2008. This Center encompasses 580,000 square feet of space on three levels above and below ground. The footprint is approximately five acres, which is about 193,000 square feet, and is larger than the foot print of the Capitol itself. The CVC will include a great hall that will include information and ticketing desks, as well as provide a generous waiting area. In addition, there will be also an exhibition gallery, two orientation theaters, a new dining cafeteria with capacity for 550 people, two gift shops, 26 restrooms, and a 1,000 foot linear tunnel for truck loading and delivery. The overall project budget is \$548 million.

H.R. 3315 is a bill to designate the great hall of the CVC as Emancipation Hall. Representative Wamp introduced this bill on August 2, 2007, with 227 original co-sponsors.

PRIOR LEGISLATIVE AND OVERSIGHT ACTIVITY

The Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure has jurisdiction over designation of public spaces in the U.S. Capitol. The Subcommittee has not held legislative hearings specifically dedicated to naming the great hall but has conducted ongoing oversight over the CVC project. Most recently, on June 8, 2007, the Subcommittee held a hearing on “What Visitors Can Expect at the Capitol Visitors Center: Transportation, Access, Security and Visuals”.

WITNESSES

The Honorable Jesse Jackson, Jr.
Member of Congress
(IL-02)

The Honorable Zach Wamp
Member of Congress
(TN-03)