



Statement of Thomas Austin, Architect

Fiscal Year 2027 Budget Request, Architect of the Capitol

Legislative Branch Subcommittee | House Committee on Appropriations

March 18, 2026

Chairman Valadao, Ranking Member Espaillat, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the Architect of the Capitol's (AOC) budget request for Fiscal Year (FY) 2027. We remain committed to collaborating closely with you and your staff to ensure the AOC meets the needs and expectations of the U.S. House of Representatives in service to Congress and the American people.

As the 13th Architect of the Capitol, it is a privilege to be a steward of the historic buildings and surroundings that make up the Capitol campus, ensuring their preservation, functionality, and safety for Members of Congress, staff, and visitors, while providing an enduring home for American democracy. On behalf of the entire leadership team, I want to express our sincere gratitude to the more than 2,600 hardworking and devoted AOC employees who consistently carry out their duties in support of Congress, the Supreme Court, the Library of Congress (Library), and the many other AOC-managed facilities, with diligence and pride.

During my tenure, I have made it a priority to provide consistent, transparent communication with Members of Congress and their staff, other legislative support agencies, and Architect of the Capitol employees. Accurate and timely engagement is essential to maintaining trust and confidence in our agency's leadership. From managing routine maintenance to shaping the agency's long-term goals, I am committed to providing information that is objective, reliable and delivered promptly.

In maintaining the trust required with this role, I strive to lead with openness, honesty and integrity as we meet our mission to serve Congress and the Supreme Court, preserve America's Capitol, and inspire memorable experiences.

1. Overview

Our staff works tirelessly to maintain and preserve over 18.5 million square feet of facilities, 570 acres of grounds, and thousands of works of art. Operating 24 hours a day, seven days a week, the team works in concert to protect and sustain our historic assets and maintain aging infrastructure. Beyond these preservation and maintenance priorities, our team is also responsible for executing ceremonial and civic events that define the nation's democratic and seasonal traditions and bring together millions of visitors each year.

For FY 2027, the AOC is requesting \$1.6 billion in appropriations to ensure life-safety and physical security, address critical infrastructure needs, preserve historic assets, and invest in modernization efforts across the Capitol campus. This request is substantially larger than previous years due to two main factors. First, facility repair projects from prior years that were not funded continue to compound in the form of deferred maintenance. The FY 2026 enacted funding required internal budget adjustments, resulting in delayed projects and operational constraints. Second, this funding request includes major initiatives to address the most pressing needs of the campus, and maintain the integrity and functionality of the aging facilities, specifically the much-needed renovation of the Rayburn House Office Building.

Additional Capitol infrastructure projects, critical security enhancements, workforce investments, and emergent critical mission requirements are also included in the FY 2027 budget request. The requested increase is a strategic investment in long-term efficiency, resiliency, safety and preservation.

2. Prioritizing Physical Security & Life Safety

We remain committed to ensuring that physical security and life safety are always prioritized. Your support has enabled the AOC to make substantial progress in strengthening security measures with projects to improve pedestrian screening, hardening external windows and doors, and improved lighting across the campus. Collaboration with internal and external partners has bolstered emergency planning and security for events at the Capitol campus. The FY 2027 budget request aligns with our coordinated approach to address security projects, including infrastructure improvements and major system replacements, to support the needs and missions of the United States Capitol Police and the House and Senate Sergeants at Arms.

The agency also remains committed to staff safety, dedicating the time and attention necessary to essential training and emergency management. This budget request recognizes these essential measures and supports projects that align with our focused effort to avoid hazards, reduce risks, and prevent operational interruptions, while prioritizing protection, readiness, and a culture of preparedness.

3. Supporting Continuity of Congress and the House Community

The AOC's FY 2027 budget request highlights key priorities for the House Office Buildings and House operations; these critical needs can be effectively addressed through close collaboration with this Subcommittee and the Committee on House Administration.

As the Cannon House Office Building Renewal project enters its close-out phase, we are proud that it has delivered measurable benefits to the community. We are returning the building to full operation and successfully addressing unique challenges to preserve historic spaces while enhancing functionality. The FY 2027 budget request continues to plan for the future long-term needs of the Capitol campus to support Congress in carrying out its constitutional duties.

Many of our buildings require significant investment, but the top priority is the much-needed renovation of the Rayburn House Office Building, the largest and most urgent infrastructure project on the campus. Based on my personal observations and evaluation of the facility assessments, I am most concerned with the level of risk of a catastrophic system failure in Rayburn in its current state. The condition of Rayburn is at a serious juncture, and time is of the essence to address risks to operational reliability, life safety, and the continuity of congressional operations. Aging mechanical systems, persistent leaks, and structural issues have made a full-scale renovation essential. As many of the building systems are well beyond their useful life, we have noticed a concerning uptick in frequency of mechanical, electrical, and plumbing issues in the facility. In the past year alone, we had to address frequent elevator and escalator outages, major mechanical failures, multiple fire incidents, and dozens of water intrusions costing over \$2 million in emergency repairs and necessitating immediate hazardous material abatement and the displacement of multiple Member of Congress.

We are at a critical point with Rayburn where we can no longer wait to begin its renovation. Continued reliance on reactive maintenance is no longer cost-effective and exposes the facility to escalating risks. Timely investment is critical to prevent further deterioration, reduce hazards, keep vital building systems operational, and avoid a catastrophic failure that could impact Members, staff and the public. We have

requested funding in Fiscal Year 2027 to further develop the designs of the Rayburn renovation and required swing space options, and to address current and future parking requirements which would be necessary throughout the duration of the project.

These long-term investment projects will require significant and sustained funding in addition to the AOC's annual operating budget. They are vital to addressing the deteriorating historic facilities and the infrastructure needed to ensure the continuity of Congress and safety across the campus. Strategic investment now reduces long-term costs and risks in the future.

4. Maintenance and Modernization of Aging Infrastructure

The AOC is dedicated to a long-term facilities management strategy that emphasizes the maintenance, preservation, and modernization of the Capitol campus. The Capitol campus' aging infrastructure and facilities present ongoing challenges, further compounded by the need for uninterrupted operations and unforeseen emergency repairs. To help meet this challenge, the AOC developed the Capitol Complex Master Plan (CCMP) to provide a strategic framework for addressing deferred maintenance and capital renewal for all facilities across the Capitol campus over the next 20 years. The Capitol Campus Blueprint (CCB) is the AOC's strategy for implementation of the most urgent priorities of the CCMP. It focuses on near-term critical capital investments necessary to address deteriorating historic facilities, space shortfalls, and infrastructure resilience needed to support congressional needs, campus security, and the life safety of everyone who works in or visits the Capitol campus.

The AOC's FY 2027 budget request focuses on critical priorities, including upgrading hearing rooms, maintaining aging elevators, replacing mechanical systems, and renovating fire alarm and suppression systems.

Additionally, the AOC continues to develop our Enterprise Asset Management system to enable a more integrated, lifecycle-based approach to managing, coordinating, and overseeing facilities, equipment, and infrastructure. A well-developed asset management system will provide detailed insights into asset conditions and the necessary data for forecasting capital renewal and prioritizing projects, while also addressing backlog and deferred maintenance.

5. Workforce Investments & Meeting Mission Requirements

Our workforce remains our greatest asset and the foundation of the AOC's mission success. A highly skilled, supported and stable workforce ensures effective stewardship of the assets we manage, continuity of operations, and the timely delivery of services to Members, staff and the American public. The agency must ensure it continues to attract and retain a skilled workforce capable of maintaining and modernizing the Capitol campus. Our Human Capital Strategy is anchored on three key pillars: attracting top talent through strategic acquisition, enhancing skills through talent development, and fostering a motivated workforce by prioritizing employee engagement and retention. Strategic investment in recruitment, retention and training reduces costly turnover, preserves institutional knowledge, and strengthens operational continuity.

The FY 2027 budget request will help us recruit and retain a skilled workforce to meet the needs of Congress and address critical skill gaps needed to meet both current operational demands and future challenges.

6. Conclusion

On behalf of the men and women at the AOC, I extend our sincere appreciation to the Appropriations Committee and this Subcommittee for your continued support. Your steadfast dedication and partnership in serving the American people are essential to our daily operations and the successful fulfillment of our mission. Chairman Valadao, Ranking Member Espallat, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for your time and support in consideration of the AOC's FY 2027 budget request.