

**Statement of The Honorable J. Brett Blanton
Architect of the Capitol**



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J. Brett Blanton**

**Statement before the Subcommittee on Legislative Branch,
Committee on Appropriations, United States House of Representatives**

Hearing on Health and Wellness of Employees and State of Damage and Preservation
as a Result of January 6, 2021

February 24, 2021

Chairman Ryan, Ranking Member Herrera Beutler, and members of the subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today about the Architect of the Capitol's (AOC) response efforts following the January 6, 2021 U.S. Capitol building breach.

The events of January 6 were difficult for the American people, and extremely hard for all of us on campus to witness. As we continue to deal with the shock and disappointment of the actions of those who chose to attack the U.S. Capitol Building, I remain proud of and encouraged by the professionalism displayed by the AOC team in the face of this dangerous and stressful event.

On January 6, members of my team were preparing the grounds and the inauguration stage. The day was bright and clear, and our artists were excited to finish painting the stands a bright white with a deep blue edging on the main stage of the platform. At about mid-day, as crowds began to appear on the West Front, our staff was moved indoors. Over the course of a couple of hours, the hard work of our team was destroyed. The platform was wrecked, there was broken glass and other debris, sound systems and photography equipment was damaged beyond repair or stolen, two historic Olmsted lanterns were ripped from the ground, and the wet blue paint was tracked all over the historic stone balustrades and Capitol Building hallways.

As the crowd began crashing through windows and prying open doors, my staff undertook several amazing actions in support of Congress. AOC employees sheltered congressional staff in their shops to protect them from the roving mob, other members of our team raced to the roof to reverse the airflows within the building to help clear the air of chemical irritants, like bear repellents and pepper spray, while more team members rushed bottles of water and eye wash stations to Capitol Police officers in need of assistance.

As an agency, we served as a shining light of hope that day and in the days following the insurrection. As soon as security officials cleared the building breach, AOC employees worked tirelessly to cleanup and begin repair work. Carpenters covered open windows and doors with plywood to help secure the building, laborers began sweeping up glass and broken furniture to enable Congress to continue its work, our groundskeepers cleared a small mountain of debris left behind on the West and East Fronts. And our painters carefully repainted the platform. We were committed to, and ensured that, the Electoral College certification process could continue on January 6th. Furthermore, we were sharply focused on ensuring the campus was prepared for the presidential inauguration without interruption to signal our nation's determination to support a peaceful transition of power.

At this time, our teams also began to carefully assess the damage to the historic building and grounds. The initial assessment is that most of the damage – in areas maintained by the AOC – on the interior and envelope of the building was broken glass, broken doors and graffiti. Statues, murals, historic benches and original shutters all suffered varying degrees of damage, primarily from pepper spray accretions and residue from chemical irritants and fire extinguishers. This damage to our precious artwork and statues will require expert cleaning and conservation.

Though much work remains to be done, I am also mindful of the stress that the event has had on my employees. Common reactions to situations such as these include stress, anxiety and depression. The safety and personal health of AOC employees is my highest priority.

I am committed to making sure the agency continues to provide the necessary support services through our Employee Assistance Program (EAP), which is free, voluntary and confidential. Employees have access to trained staff counselors through EAP. They can also use TalkNow, which offers AOC employees immediate, 24/7 telephonic access to confidential, in-the-moment counseling support delivered by qualified behavioral health professionals, with no appointment necessary. In addition, many of the resources from the House Wellness Center and the House Office of Employee Assistance are available to AOC employees. This service includes a variety of professional support services and resources to address the needs of individual employees and their family members, as well as the concerns of the greater organization and its managers.

In the weeks following the building breach, we also hosted an “Office Hours” employee session to provide a venue for all employees to share their concerns, ask questions and hear directly from our Director of EAP and the agency’s Ombudsman. We are also planning proactive group counseling for our tradesmen, support staff and artists directly impacted by January 6.

Looking ahead, there will be many discussions about the security of the campus. The AOC has assembled a team of highly specialized professionals to treat and maintain the Capitol’s historic fabric and artworks. The Appropriations Committees approved a transfer request of \$30,000,000 that will address the AOC’s expenses incurred to date and extend the temporary perimeter fencing contract through March 31.

Since January 6, the AOC has ensured that all available security-related resources be used to support the required emergency security costs, including temporary perimeter fencing and support for the National Guard. While this transfer addresses some of this need, expenses that we know are forthcoming are unfunded. Additional resources will also be needed should the elevated security posture of the campus extend past March 31.

In addition, I respectfully request the committee’s assistance to pursue funding for a campus-wide, comprehensive facility security assessment that coordinates previous studies and other ongoing reviews or assessments. My professional opinion is that this study is critical to the overall safety of the Capitol facilities, and ultimately, members of congress and their staffs. I appreciate your support and look forward to working with you on this effort.

The events of January 6 were stark reminders that institutional biases, priorities and actions taken out-of-sync with actionable data resulted in poor decisions. If we do not learn from these mistakes, the campus will continue to remain vulnerable to unknown and unexpected threats. History teaches us that project costs for replacements and repairs beyond in-kind improvements across campus will be considerable and beyond the scope of the current budgetary environment. The agency’s facility security assessment is a pre-requisite to considering any new project work. We owe it to taxpayers to accurately and adequately address campus needs in coordination with all appropriate entities as proposed in the assessment.

Many members have asked about preservation of damaged items as a remembrance of this sad day. We have identified damaged materials from that day, and those were turned over to the Department of Justice. For safety reasons, the AOC is replacing broken windows and doors. For example, we have removed the damaged glass in the windows in the historic Columbus Doors on the East Front, however, we preserved the panels for a potential presentation or display.

Several have asked about what did I know, as a Capitol Police Board member, about the events of January 6. Leading up to the 6th, I participated in a “Law Enforcement Partners Inauguration Briefing: hosted by Chief Steven Sund, USCP.” During the inauguration briefing, then-Chief Sund mentioned the expected rally near the White House but there were no actionable intelligence or credible threats shared at that meeting. In terms of support for USCP, as I have shared previously, then-chief Sund did not reach out to the Architect of the Capitol with a request for an emergency declaration or interest seeking National Guard support in advance of the breach. Then-Chief Sund confirmed in his February 1, 2021 letter to Speaker Pelosi that he engaged in conversations with other members of the Board – House and Senate Sergeants at Arms – but no such conversation occurred with me or any AOC employee involved in Board matters. In addition, the AOC has no record of the January 3 intel briefing cited in the media and by Acting Chief Pittman.

Finally, concerning the overall safety of the Capitol campus, I would be remiss if I did not mention our commitment toward ensuring that adequate measures are taken to mitigate the threat of COVID-19 pandemic across the Capitol campus. In the spirit of full-transparency, I have worked with the subcommittee staff to provide accurate cost updates to continue our COVID-19 response efforts. Other than our initial installment of funding, which is fully obligated, the AOC has been forced to use our critical infrastructure and security project funding to support Congress at a service level required for enhanced cleaning and PPE. I ask for your support for our requested security and COVID-19 funding.

Since becoming Architect of the Capitol a little over one year ago, I have continually been impressed and inspired by the great work of this agency. We have been in pandemic operations for nearly a year, we supported three lying in state and honor ceremonies and prepared for a presidential inauguration. I am honored to lead a team whose extraordinary efforts on January 6, and the days that followed, helped Americans of all walks of life take solace in seeing order restored to the U.S. Capitol. We would appreciate your support to ensure that we are positioned to address the on-going and future facility needs, in addition to the health and wellness of our incredible employees.