

REFORMING THE ARCHITECT'S OFFICE

During the Appropriations Committee's consideration of Legislative Branch spending bill, Ranking Member David Obey offered an amendment that would place the Office of the Architect of the Capitol in receivership under the supervision of the Comptroller General. The amendment would immediately transfer all authorities exercised by the Architect to the Comptroller or his designee, including all duties related to the execution and supervision of contracts and the hiring, firing, and supervision of staff. The amendments passed on a voice vote, and was included in the bill passed by the full House.

The problems related to the Architect's supervision of the construction of the Capitol Visitors Center (CVC) are well known.

- Once estimated to cost \$265 million, the CVC's price tag has ballooned to around \$584 million.
- According to the latest Government Accountability Office (GAO) estimates, the CVC will not open until the summer of fall of 2007 at the earliest – two years behind schedule.
- The most recent reviews by both the GAO and the Appropriations Committee indicate that further delays and cost overruns are likely.
- Congress learned in February of this year of worker safety issues in the CVC utility tunnels involving structural hazards and exposure to asbestos. These issues only became known to the Congress due to a formal complaint filed by the Office of Compliance.
- The Architect testified before the Committee on March 14, gave assurances that the issue was under control, and offered no indication that significant additional funding would be needed to address worker safety issues.
- On April 12th, without prior notice to the Committee, the Architect submitted a \$118 million proposal for emergency repairs and upgrades to the tunnels and indicated that the total cost of repairs could exceed \$200 million.



An artist's rendering of the CVC entrance. The Government Accountability Office says it will be a long time before these doors are open to the public.

In addition to management and worker safety issues, there are also serious issues with the design of the CVC itself. A portion of this construction project was to provide additional workspace for the Congress. The current design for this space is wasteful and inadequate.

- Only 20 percent of the space allotted to the House is for legislative meeting rooms while 30 percent is provided for media functions.
- The largest meeting room is unsuitable for a major House-Senate conference. The House will continue to lack a room that can adequately host a conference.

Placing the Architect's office into temporary receivership deals with the immediate problem of safeguarding taxpayer dollars and more effectively managing existing projects.