

## HISTORY COMMENTARY

A Public-Private Stewardship for Washington's Legislative Building? YES!

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Growing up in the 1920s in the quiet New Jersey "commuter town" of Plainfield somehow steered my youthful mind to the ancient legends of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. We lived only 20 miles from the excitement of New York City, yet I was more entranced by the exploits of Roland and Charlemagne, two of the most famous armored warriors of the Middle Ages. By the age of 10 or 12 I was already hooked on history. Here is where I found my first heroes, and I'm still hooked today.

As I began to notice the nurtured publications in our home, I found a special gold-covered issue of a magazine called *The Washingtonian*. Inside were eye-catching pictures and a big story on Washington's monumental Legislative Building, newly finished on the shores of Puget Sound, way across the country. This classical structure, with its towering dome, broad granite steps, and immense carved stone columns—plus its marble hallways, huge bronze doors, Tiffany chandeliers, and spectacular furnishings—had captured a prestigious architectural award. Even a raw New Jersey youngster could see that something very big was going on in that state called Washington. It seemed as if I was looking at history up close.

What great pride and awe I felt as I came to understand that my father and his architectural partner (their firm name: Wilder and White of New York) had played a key role in this current step forward in government—the creation of the new Washington State Legislative Building! With the passing of time and patient instruction from family, teachers and authors, I learned much more about Washington's "audacious state capitol and its builders"—a distinctive, marvelous phrase captured by Professor Norman J. Johnston of the University of Washington to spotlight a remarkable project and the group of people who dared to plan and build it. I can never forget that Washington incurred no bonded debt to handle this remarkable \$7.5 million project in the 1920s. As with the design and construction of Washington's Temple of Justice and Insurance Building, timber revenues had paid all the bills, making the new Legislative Building seem like a gift to all the people of Washington.

Now let's hit the "fast-forward" button—almost to the present. Take a new look at our proud Legislative Building and what do you see? On the surface, grandeur and classic beauty still dominate the major public areas, but almost everywhere there is a distinct undercurrent of constant, heavy visitor traffic, overcrowding and clutter. There are pervasive signs of wear and tear and worrisome maintenance troubles in tired rest rooms and legislative support spaces. And with the repeated costly experience of unexpected interior water leaks, water infiltration into decorative exterior stone, and standing water in clogged roof or plaza channels, there is increasing pressure on the routine systems used for maintenance. Too little money has been

turning up in annual repair budgets. Too little action has been initiated to preserve, protect and renew this classic structure.

Yet, during the last decade we have had our connection to history on the front burner in Olympia as state leaders, consultants and specialists have examined and considered both immediate and long-term problems and options involving the care of our 72-year-old Legislative Building. In fact, the more this building has come to be "a most treasured historical symbol," the more it has become the focal point of concerned study. Several recent events reinforce the opportunity for new directions and new decisions tied in with any commitment to the Legislative Building.

First was the completion in January 1999 of a comprehensive predesign study on the Legislative Building's renovation and preservation by a team of two Seattle architectural firms—PBA+BSA Architects and Leavengood Architects. This 15-month study, initiated in 1997, was conducted for the Department of General Administration and its ten-member Legislative Building Renovation Committee, composed of elected and appointed officials. In September 1999, at the suggestion of the Office of Financial Management, an independent "value engineering" team of highly qualified consultants was assembled to review the predesign package and provide a high-level technical assessment of the projects being proposed. While the predesign study and the technical assessment raised many unanswered questions, they set in motion a process for preserving and renewing the Legislative Building.

The second event that resulted in a new approach to the stewardship of this important structure was the passage in April 1999 of House Resolution 4410, with the senate concurring. This resolution established the Commission on Legislative Building Preservation and Renovation. The commission was directed to develop a preservation/renovation plan, identify resources, and report its progress and recommendations to the legislature in the 2000 legislative session. With a series of monthly meetings, starting in July 1999, and sub-committees also at work, this commission has been growing into its desired basic planning role as specified by the legislature.

The third event was an initial "consensus step" taken in October 1999 by the commission. Considering the challenges ahead, members came to agree that major parts of the building's total preservation and renovation were automatically the responsibility of the public sector while other elements and aspects of a future care package called for special talents and resources distinctively found within the private sector. This opened the door to an interesting concept: Would the Legislative Building benefit from a public-private partnership? And how could such a partnership be established and implemented?

The house resolution had directed the commission to investigate all areas of possible citizen involvement in the project. Said the commission: "Let's explore this avenue of private citizen participation. It is at work already in other government tasks and assignments. It might be very useful and helpful here."

Architects Bud Schorr, David Leavengood and Peter Bocek were frank and direct in their January predesign executive summary. They stated: "The Legislative Building, the legislative center and democratic symbol of Washington's statehood, is in a continuing state of decay...and there are extremely compelling reasons to change the course of this deterioration—both inside and out." Specifically, they noted that the building is unsafe, its infrastructure systems are failing, the roof

and walls are leaking, the decorative stonework is eroding, spaces are overcrowded and, finally, the foremost symbol of Washington's statehood must be renewed and preserved.

Pictures, sketches and diagrams reinforced these startling points, revealing some very serious interior and exterior conditions. Among the safety factors were these: the building has no sprinkler protection system and no smoke control system; there are not enough exits, per code, for an emergency evacuation; many doors swing against the flow of exiting; and the dome requires reinforcing to reduce seismic stress.

In their summary the architects detailed an eight-year program for exterior preservation at a projected cost of \$29.9 million. This preservation project has, in fact, already been started. Much more work is scheduled for coming years. This includes critical elements such as cleaning and protection of stone; elimination of water infiltration, especially related to fragile areas of damaged decorative stone; repair and preservation of the plaza as well as the lantern on top of the dome; and repair of the monumental north stairs.

Overall, the summary may one day lead to a comprehensive long-term maintenance and preservation plan that "routinely evaluates, cleans and repairs damage to the building's waterproofing and drainage systems." An added recommendation by the architects urges "the Owner to insist on a Preservation Specialist to have oversight on all future interior or exterior work on the building to insure that the historic integrity of the structure is maintained."

Several options were suggested for interior renovation, tracking ideas that emerged from earlier sounding-board meetings of the Renovation Committee and other internal focus groups representing people who work in the building. To relieve overcrowding, for example, the architects roughed out an idea for a new underground extension to the building that would be located adjacent to the south portico. This would provide a weather-protected link to legislative offices in the nearby Cherberg and O'Brien office buildings, as well as the Pritchard State Library.

Visitors and tourists are another element requiring planning and attention at the Legislative Building. Each year hundreds of thousands of out-of-towners visit the capitol. Tour guides, including many volunteers, are on hand to host these visitors. Learning about government has become an important adjunct to public education. This has generated a large number of student visitors to the Legislative Building—as many as 900 a day when the legislature is in session. There are also occasions when sizable groups of activists appear at the Legislative Building, sometimes numbering in the thousands for a particular demonstration.

The high volume of public traffic in and around the Legislative Building has prompted questions on how to better accommodate visitors, including what might be done to move informal bag lunches by student groups away from rotunda stairways. The predesign study looked at various ideas, suggesting that part of the first floor might be a public gathering place with planned exhibit areas for groups wishing to bring a message to legislators. Independently, the commission and the value engineering team, led by consultant Bob Rude, came to the same conclusion: legislative business must have the highest space priority within the Legislative Building. Other potential options for public uses would not fit the primary purpose of this government building.

Complex space planning questions are still on the table, however, and new elements have surfaced at almost every commission meeting. The architects' predesign study had proposed a single-level underground office extension of perhaps 40,000 to 59,000 square feet to help

relieve overcrowding. The value engineering team came up with attractive space-saving ideas and thoughts, too, about new interior stairwells in each wing of the Legislative Building to meet life-safety fire code requirements. Also, a difficult new seismic issue has appeared. This concerns the physical attachment of exterior stone. In October Rude told the commission that stainless steel anchors might be needed to keep sandstone from falling in an earthquake. Such a seismic upgrade could cost up to \$22 million, said Rude, as he agreed that further study on this issue is needed. A formal report from the value engineering team is expected by February 2000.

By the November 1999 commission meeting it was apparent that planning was still unsettled on many questions. Pertinent information was still being generated on space requirements, and reconciliation of conflicting recommendations was not yet complete. But preliminary estimates for an underground extension plus renovation of the Legislative Building had been listed in the predesign study at \$87.5 million. So an early total indicated that the cost of preservation and renovation was around \$117.4 million—certainly enough to get the attention of any legislator. And a seismic upgrade would boost this total to \$140 million. The preliminary outline of a plan for the legislature was coming into focus.

Last April, when the house and senate adopted House Resolution 4410 to preserve, protect and renovate the Legislative Building, they specified that the new commission should include eight legislators, six major government officials, and five private citizens (to be appointed by the governor). As its first order of business the commission added two more citizens as honorary members. They take part in deliberations but have no vote. Altogether, in terms of background and experience, the diversity of the members is noteworthy. Among the citizens, for example, are a television broadcast executive, two emeritus professors in architecture, a museum development executive, a former computer marketing executive active in historic restoration, a former mayor of Wenatchee, and a retired industrial public relations executive.

In identifying a plan and resources for the preservation and renovation task, the resolution instructs the commission "to look first to traditionally dedicated and trust revenues as the funding source while investigating all avenues of citizen involvement to engage the public in contributing to the renovation and preservation of the legislative building."

So, altogether, the stage has been set for vital direction, oversight and planning by a special group of Washington people. Internal logistical support comes from the Department of General Administration and external advice and experience from specialized consultants. Prompt feedback goes directly to the legislature. The public is engaged and connected in the planning. The commission is acting for the people to get the project under way and quite possibly to see it through, while the legislature holds the ultimate "power of the purse." Nothing will truly happen until funds are allocated.

Regarding major funding, the commission appears ready to count first on dedicated trust revenues—the final planning to be done when the parameters of the project are in hand. Finance subcommittee meetings have been looking at the details.

The mandate for citizen involvement is a key part of the legislative resolution. Will that citizen just read about the "long-ago, tax-free gift" of the original Legislative Building to Washington citizens and then yawn? Or will he or she have some history in mind and think about getting involved? How is this to be accomplished in light of a couple of hard-edged perceptions about the Legislative Building that could be on anyone's mind? Probably the first is this: "So there's a

problem with the Legislative Building? The state should pay for its own repairs!" The second perception is likely to be: "The state's neglect has created the problem; don't dump it on me!"

These likely reactions suggest that there is a strong need for citizen commitment to our state's history. That commitment must simply override any shortcomings or failures of our democratic system. We cannot allow the centerpiece of our state's government to fall into disrepair. So, now is the time to consider what is required to put our Legislative Building back in order and back in its place as the gem of the Northwest. As House Resolution 4410 notes, "This building is a unique American contribution to architectural history and an outstanding example of the imperial classic tradition and the City Beautiful Movement in America."

That is why last October the commission held initial informal discussions on the potential interest of private citizens in the preservation and renovation project. Certain segments of the project were seen as candidates for special attention by the private sector. The commission came to a consensus on the positive value of a private foundation as a useful instrument to help create the public-private partnership. The mechanism for a foundation and details of any foundation are as yet undecided and uncertain. It is clear, however, that decisions on this foundation can only come from private individuals brought together by a common interest in the Legislative Building.

One suggestion was: "Create an endowment for stone replacement...for the purpose of generating funds indefinitely into the future for the continued maintenance and conservation of the Legislative Building exterior."

This sandstone quarry endowment is not the only challenge for a Legislative Building foundation. The commission has reviewed the need for resources "to finish the building with appropriate touches of art, in keeping with original plans by architects Wilder and White." The current architects' request for a preservation specialist—really a special consultant on call to provide oversight on future interior and exterior work—remains unanswered. Support from the private sector through a well-funded foundation holds particular promise for raising the level of public interest in the building and for helping to move the level of maintenance to a higher standard. There is a prospect, too, of real "people dividends" for our state as more and more individual citizens build personal ties with their government, bringing significant citizen experience and talent to state operations.

The ultimate goals, the ultimate achievements of such a foundation and, in turn, the ultimate performance of the public-private partnership on the Legislative Building will only be realized as the citizens of Washington decide what they want from that partnership. Generating a public-private stewardship of our Legislative Building is not an easy task, but there is a great deal at stake. It is a practical assignment challenging citizen interest and commitment. How will the citizens of Washington respond to this unfolding challenge?

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