

Stenographic Transcript
Before the

COMMITTEE ON
RULES AND ADMINISTRATION

UNITED STATES SENATE

NOMINATION HEARING

Thursday, December 12, 2019

Washington, D.C.

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1 NOMINATION HEARING

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3 Thursday, December 12, 2019

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5 U.S. Senate

6 Committee on Rules and Administration

7 Washington, D.C.

8
9 The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:00 a.m.,
10 in Room SR-301, Russell Senate Office building, Hon. Roy
11 Fischer, chairman of the committee, presiding.

12 Present: Senators Blunt [presiding], and Fischer.
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1 OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR BLUNT

2 The Chairman. The committee on Rules and
3 Administration will come to order good morning. I think
4 some of my colleagues will be attending as the hearing
5 progresses, but I am certainly glad to be here with Brett
6 Blanton, the President's nominee to be the Architect of the
7 Capitol. Also pleased to see Tom Carroll here who has
8 stepped in as the Acting Architect with lots of big
9 projects and frankly waiting for the permanent Architect to
10 be chosen. Tom has been doing a lot of those projects
11 without the kind of support that the Architect would
12 normally have. So Tom, thanks for your leadership and
13 stepping up.

14 Before you begin your remarks, Mr. Blanton, I would
15 like to extend my congratulations to you on this nomination
16 and recognize your family, your wife Michelle, your
17 daughters Reilly and Kiran, your mom Ann, and Grandpa
18 Steve. My staff and I had the privilege of meeting with a
19 number of people on this topic, but when we met with Mr.
20 Blanton, it was obvious that his background and his
21 credentials were a great match for this job.

22 So glad to see the President make this decision. Mr.
23 Blanton was plans a licensed professional engineer. He
24 received his Bachelor's degree in Aeronautical Engineering
25 from the U.S. Naval Academy, his Master's degree in Ocean

1 Engineering from Virginia Tech. He is a third-generation
2 naval officer, having spent 21 years in the Navy where he
3 received the Bronze Star for his service to Iraq. Mr.
4 Blanton's last position in the Navy was the Acting Chief
5 Engineer for the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington, D.C.
6 And Mr. Blanton, thanks for your military service. He also
7 now brings to this position over 25 years of executive
8 experience, and facilities operations and construction
9 management.

10 He is currently the Deputy Vice President for the
11 Metropolitan Washington Airport Authority, where he is
12 implementing a \$1.5 billion long-term strategic capital
13 plan for both the Dulles and Reagan National Airports. So
14 I think Mr. Blanton has also played a critical role in the
15 Silver Line Metro extension to Dulles. If the Senate
16 confirms you, Mr. Blanton, I imagine your current employer
17 will miss your skills very much, but we look forward to
18 having them here. It is a big job.

19 First Architect of the Capitol was named by George
20 Washington. The current architect will have an agency that
21 manages a budget of over \$800 million with 12
22 jurisdictions, including the Capitol building and grounds,
23 the Senate and House Office Buildings, the Library of
24 Congress, the Supreme Court, the botanical gardens, and
25 other facilities. 2,300 people ranging from architects and

1 engineers to hourly service workers are part of that job
2 and it truly is a big job. 18.4 million square feet of
3 facilities, 570 acres of grounds, thousands of works of
4 art, many monuments that make up the historic Capitol
5 collection and complex, have over 3 million visitors a year
6 come to the Capitol, and frankly, the next Architect the
7 Capitol will inherit an agency experiencing a number of
8 stresses.

9 As I mentioned before, there are significant number of
10 executive leadership positions that need to be filled, but
11 for somebody taking this job, I think that is more of an
12 opportunity than it is a challenge. These buildings have
13 been here a while. So the aging nature of the architecture
14 and the infrastructure are both a challenge. We have got
15 projects going on both sides of the Capitol, House and
16 Senate. They are good examples of what a big challenge
17 that can be, but I am confident with your abilities you are
18 going to be able to successfully lead this agency. I look
19 forward to hearing your thoughts on the challenges that may
20 arise, and I will say short of some huge and unanticipated
21 problem this hearing today, I hope we can move this
22 nomination very quickly.

23 And so, Mr. Blanton, we have your written statement in
24 the record, but if you would like to share some of the
25 thoughts in that statement or the statement itself with us,

1 let us take about five minutes for that.

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1 STATEMENT OF JAMES BRETT BLANTON,
2 TO BE THE ARCHITECT OF THE CAPITOL

3 Mr. Blanton. Thank you, Chairman Blunt, Senator
4 Fischer, and other members of the committee. I will give
5 you an abridged version of my opening statement for the
6 sake of time. I am honored to appear before you as
7 President Trump's nominee to become the 12th Architect of
8 the Capitol. Before I begin, I would like to recognize and
9 thank my loving wife Michelle, my daughters Reilly and
10 Kiran, Alexis our eldest daughter lives in Ohio and could
11 not attend in such short notice.

12 I would like to also thank Ann, my mother, and Grandpa
13 Steve who are in attendance. Without the strong support
14 and moral guidance of my family, I would not be where I am
15 today. Finally, I would like to thank you and your staff
16 for the comprehensive and thorough bipartisan, bicameral
17 Congressional commission, which yielded several highly
18 qualified candidates for the President to select a nominee.
19 I am truly honored to be that nominee.

20 Chairman, as you allude to, the origins of the
21 Architect of the Capitol are rooted in the very history of
22 our representative republic in the city of Washington, D.C.
23 President George Washington appointed three commissioners
24 to provide a suitable building to accommodate Congress.
25 The commissioners hired Pierre L'Enfant to lay out the

1 capital city and stage a competition for the design of the
2 Capitol itself.

3 President Washington awarded the Capitol Building to
4 Dr. William Thornton for his design to serve as the
5 blueprint for America's Government headquarters. William
6 Thornton is credited as the first Architect of the Capitol,
7 commonly called AOC. The vision of William Thornton has
8 been extended through 10 successors. And in fact, the
9 Capitol has been undergoing continue construction with
10 exception of a small period of time during the 1800s since
11 George Washington laid the cornerstone in 1793.

12 Today, AOC employees work every day to serve Congress
13 and the Supreme Court, preserve America's Capitol, and
14 inspire memorable experiences for those who visit the
15 building and grounds. This enormous responsibility of
16 these duties is not lost on me. The AOC staff is
17 responsible to the U.S. Congress for the maintenance,
18 operation, development, preservation of 18.4 million square
19 feet of facilities, 570 acres of grounds, and thousands of
20 works of art. I bring a unique background to the Architect
21 of the Capitol.

22 I consider myself a leader of change with extensive
23 experience in facilities operations and construction
24 managements in highly visible and public environments. My
25 experience includes developing long-term master planning,

1 project planning, sustainable design, building maintenance,
2 physical security management, and financial management. I
3 pride myself with the ability to simultaneous develop
4 short-term and long-term capital funding priorities across
5 multiple locations.

6 Currently at the Metropolitan Washington Airports
7 Authority, I Am leading a \$1.5 billion Capital planning and
8 design construction program at two of the most
9 architecturally significant facilities in the greater
10 Washington, D.C. area, the Eero Saarinen designed Terminal
11 at Dulles International Airport, and the Cesar Pelli
12 designed terminal at Reagan National. Major construction
13 projects at airports involve many of the same risks and
14 challenges experienced on the Capitol campus. The work
15 must occur while minimizing disruption to tenants,
16 occupants, and the traveling public.

17 Additionally, safety and health concerns are paramount
18 while executing construction at locations that serve
19 approximately 50 million passengers a year. I am also a
20 retired civil engineer corps officer who oversaw some of
21 the largest infrastructure projects undertaken by the
22 Department of Navy. I served as an adviser to Senate
23 confirmed political appointees and two Administrations of
24 both political parties and worked to formulate and manage
25 Navy and Marine Corps energy, installation, and environment

1 policies. I was a Federal Acquisition Professional with
2 the highest contracting warrant. I am a registered
3 professional engineer and a graduate of the U.S. Naval
4 Academy.

5 My military career offered me diverse leadership
6 experiences ranging from U.S. and overseas locations to
7 serving in combat zones, Navy headquarters, and the joint
8 staff. I fully realize trade organizations and magazines
9 have taken public opinion that the Architect of Capitol
10 must be an architect. I respectfully disagree.

11 The Architect of the Capitol needs to be a strong,
12 transformational leader who has experience managing
13 historical facilities in a customer service environment.
14 It requires a leader who will usher in a new era of
15 transparency and accountability to effectively maintain and
16 preserve the universally recognized symbol of Western
17 democracy in the world. I am that leader. The Office of
18 the Architect of the Capitol has a well-deserved reputation
19 of employing some of the Nation's best engineers,
20 architects, historical preservationists, and skilled trades
21 personnel.

22 However, in recent years, there have been some
23 leadership challenges which contribute to difficulty
24 attracting and retaining skilled and engaged workforce. In
25 order to maintain these iconic facilities on the Capitol

1 campus, we must recruit, train, and retain the best
2 possible workforce.

3 Unfortunately the AOC's glassdoor.com rating, which is
4 a website many professionals use to determine when they are
5 seeking employment, is a neighborhood of 2 out of 5 stars.
6 We can do better. As such, I will Implement a human
7 capital strategy to address the changing workforce, ensure
8 succession planning, and train or retain our top talent.

9 Additionally. I will have a zero tolerance policy for
10 harassment, discrimination, and unethical behavior. We
11 cannot expect to attract the Nation's top workforce without
12 adapting and changing our culture. Changing the culture of
13 any large organization takes time but change must begin at
14 the top, and it must begin by implementing a new mandate of
15 transparency, accountability, and responsiveness.

16 The Office of the Architect of the Capitol must better
17 partner with the members and staff of the Senate, House,
18 and Supreme Court. Together, we all have the same goal,
19 maintaining and preserving the Capitol campus for
20 generations to come. I plan to usher in this new era of
21 stewardship. I see our first opportunity to implement the
22 new standards of transparency, accountability, and
23 responsiveness to be the planning for the 2021
24 Inauguration.

25 The Inauguration is a unique and important occurrence.

1 The world will be watching, so we must all work together to
2 ensure the next Inauguration is exceptionally successful.

3 I was happy to read that the AOC earned its 15th
4 consecutive unmodified, or clean, audit opinion on the
5 financial statements and received its eight consecutive
6 Certificate of Excellence in Accountability from the
7 Association of Government Accounts. These are no small
8 accomplishments. However is my understanding that the
9 Capitol has a \$1.77 billion maintenance backlog as of
10 September 30th.

11 Although Congress and the Office of the Architect of
12 the Capitol have a mandate to preserve our seat of
13 representative republic for future generations, it is
14 unrealistic to think that we can afford to immediately
15 appropriate funding to retire this backlog. I also
16 understand that the AOC has a robust condition assessment
17 program that meticulously categorizes the material state of
18 each facility.

19 I plan to utilize this existing condition assessment
20 program as the backbone of a comprehensive enterprise asset
21 management program that will enable us to optimize projects
22 that produce the highest rate of return for facility
23 longevity. Additionally, this will allow us to rank
24 projects against other projects to determine which projects
25 will actually have the best results.

1 Finally, when it comes to projects undertaken by AOC,
2 I plan to have a constant channel of communication in
3 between members and their staffs. As I alluded to in my
4 full statement, the more information you and your team
5 know, the less time I will spend reading and reacting to
6 questions and concerns, thus allowing me to focus on the
7 actions and issues that will transform the management of
8 the Office of the Architect of the Capitol.

9 I believe that the Office of the Architect of the
10 Capitol has all the elements to succeed in its mission to
11 serve Congress, the Supreme Court, preserve America's
12 Capitol, and inspire the memorial experiences of all who
13 visit the Capitol campus. Should I be confirmed, I will
14 build upon the enormous legacy of my 11 predecessors and
15 usher in a new era of positive change to the organization.
16 I see the members of Congress, the oversight committees,
17 your staff, and the Architect as partners in preserving the
18 most iconic symbols of Western democracy in the world.

19 Chairman Blunt and members of the committee, thank you
20 for the opportunity to appear before you today. I welcome
21 any questions you may have.

22 [The prepared statement of Mr. Blanton follows:]
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25

1 The Chairman. Well, thank you, Mr. Blanton. Let's
2 start with your commitment on transparency and
3 responsiveness. The first question just a yes or no
4 question. If confirmed, do you commit to answer every
5 question and provide all information requested by this
6 committee and its staff and to comply as soon as possible?

7 Mr. Blanton. Yes.

8 The Chairman. The comments -- I thought you made some
9 significant comments in your statement. That will of
10 course be available to all of the members. The last
11 Architect of the Capitol served only 8 years of the 10-year
12 term. If confirmed, do you plan to serve the full 10 year
13 term as Architect of the Capitol?

14 Mr. Blanton. I do. Regarding a necessity health or
15 other emergencies, it would cause me to resign.

16 The Chairman. How do you plan to recruit select and
17 retain members of your executive leadership team?

18 Mr. Blanton. So in my 25 years' experience, I have
19 developed a vast network of professionals that I trust that
20 are truly honorable and ethical people. I will use my
21 social network as well as on some of the key positions, I
22 am going to want to have headhunters involved so we can go
23 Nationwide and get the best talent possible. Part of that
24 is when we change our culture, we are going to attract
25 people because there are going to be lines of people

1 waiting who want to come here.

2 The Chairman. Well, I hope that is the case. In your
3 comments, think it was obvious you understand the
4 uniqueness of this job and in so many ways there is only
5 one like it. I was interested in your comments. I
6 mentioned 3 million visitors, you mentioned 50 million
7 passengers. You may be one of the few people that could
8 sit at that table and think, well, 3 million, surely you
9 can handle 3 million if at those two airports you have
10 handled 50 million passengers.

11 But we do want people who come to this building from
12 our country and from all over the world. There is no
13 Capitol anywhere in the world as open and as accessible as
14 this one. It is a significant example of who we are. It
15 is a significant part of who we are and being sure that
16 that experience works in the way that American citizens
17 would expect it to work and that others would be impressed
18 that it worked, I think really important. Each of the
19 agencies, 12 jurisdictions, has authority to implement and
20 discipline -- well to implement discipline and other human
21 resource policies. This can create inconsistency and
22 disparate treatment.

23 What do you think as you look at 12 entities with the
24 kind of flexibility that they had on personnel issues as
25 you look at that particular problem?

1 Mr. Blanton. Coming from DOD, it is not too uncommon
2 to have organizations that execute HR policies. However,
3 what we have, and I see that from my initial review, the
4 organization in our HR policies is that -- we need to
5 centralize the policies and procedures so there is
6 consistency amongst the organizations. The jurisdiction
7 should be able to execute them, but there should be
8 centralized so there is consistency among each one of the
9 jurisdictions.

10 The Chairman. I think that has been one of our
11 concerns in this committee that you didn't have from agency
12 to agency the same kind of well understood policies and
13 even people that would transfer from one unit to the other
14 might not know what the overall expectations were. So I
15 think that is good. I noticed also in your comments you
16 express you have zero tolerance for discrimination and
17 harassment. How would you address any incidents of
18 discrimination or harassment in the agency?

19 Mr. Blanton. Swiftly, would be the first thing. And
20 then also have to make sure our policies have set
21 procedures so that they can be addressed and the person who
22 is the victim has protections as well as the person who has
23 the complaint against them has a due process to determine
24 whether there is actually a justified complaint or not.
25 Since I have not been in a seat yet, I haven't reviewed all

1 of our policies, but I can will say it is going to be swift
2 and it will be fair.

3 The Chairman. What role do you think diversity plays
4 in creating an effective agency particularly in agency,
5 particularly an agency like this one?

6 Mr. Blanton. So for me, diversity plays -- but it is
7 more of a diversity of thought and that comes from having
8 people of different ethnic backgrounds, religious
9 backgrounds, geographic and socioeconomic backgrounds.
10 They bring in a new amount of thought. So I prioritize the
11 different opinions of different groups as when it comes to
12 being a thought leader.

13 The Chairman. You mentioned the budget and you were
14 pleased that the audits showed that, financially, the
15 audits showed a positive financial audit. What would you
16 do to ensure stewardship and accountability over this huge
17 budget that you are going to be asked to be responsible
18 for?

19 Mr. Blanton. So I view that is two questions. The
20 first question being the accountability. It shows, the
21 audits, that the accountability exists because we could
22 determine where the funds are spent and what they were
23 spent on. Stewardship is a second question that I think is
24 of much greater importance because that would allow us to
25 show, are we doing the best with the money that is

1 appropriated as opposed to just spending it and knowing
2 where we spent it.

3 I do say, I will have to review all of our policies,
4 but when it comes down to project planning and comes down
5 to the execution of it, I think strict project controls and
6 strict change management is essential to doing the best
7 stewardship of our money. And also when it touches on the
8 accountability and the responsiveness to the committees. I
9 want the committees and the staff members to know what
10 changes will occur and what the consequences of these
11 changes will be so that they can themselves judge what will
12 happen should a change occur to a project.

13 The Chairman. Good. The process of nomination by the
14 President but nominating from a group of people recommended
15 by the Congress, this is the Architect of the Capitol and
16 there is a difference on the two ends of the street here of
17 who is responsible for what. I think the chairman of House
18 Administration and I would both of you that you work for
19 the Congress. You got to be confirmed by the Congress, you
20 were recommended by the Congress.

21 I don't know that that requires any kind of response
22 from your part, but whatever you get, consultation and
23 advice from the Congress, hope you take that seriously. I
24 would expect we would have at least one hearing a year
25 where you would be here with whatever staff you think you

1 need to have with you to talk about ongoing projects, to
2 talk about the kind of progress you are making on that
3 troublesome backlog of maintenance. I think the Cannon
4 Building, while it is on the other side of the Capitol, is
5 a great example of what happens when backlogs are allowed
6 to build up and maintenance is allowed to go away and
7 nobody more than the Acting Architect of the Capitol could
8 express to us today what a challenge that has been.

9 But this job, the Architect of the Capitol is the
10 Architect that works at the direction and to report to the
11 Congress. Back to the very first question I asked, I just
12 want to be sure as we move through this today that there is
13 no uncertainty on that issue.

14 The Architect of the Capitol has in law some
15 substantial leeway, but that leeway should really only be
16 used, if you are going to have the kind of relationships
17 you want to have, with explaining why you are using it and
18 consultation and all the things you are talking about in
19 terms of stewardship, in terms of a policy that looks for
20 diversity, that insists that harassment not be part of the
21 workplace, looks for consistency. I think all good.

22 What do you do -- what is your view of how quickly you
23 want to begin to look at the master plan, review the
24 current master plan, and come up with your own sense with
25 your staff that you will soon be responsible for of where

1 that master plan makes sense and where it can't possibly be
2 executed and what needs to be added to it?

3 Mr. Blanton. So, I would like to review the current
4 master plan pretty quickly within my first 90 days. As far
5 as the next version of the master plan, I would see myself
6 starting with a little different tact. I think you start
7 out first with a vision and that vision is a collaborative
8 vision. That would be a vision that would be between the
9 Office of the Architect of the Capitol and the members and
10 staff we support.

11 That then will be transferred into more of what you
12 see as their traditional master plan, which has been the
13 projects and how you are going to implement and how you are
14 going to judge the effectiveness of your execution of it.
15 Then you immediately follow that by with the implementation
16 plan which would be a phase plan over multiple years saying
17 these five projects be executed in this sequence, for
18 example. But it all starts initially with a vision and
19 vision is the thing that needs to be shared amongst all of
20 us.

21 The Chairman. Yes. And then I think you need to
22 effectively share it with us. You know, this is the
23 oversight committee on the Senate side, but the other
24 committee, the appropriating committee, the Legislative
25 branch and the other the appropriating committee that you

1 will need to work with, very important to try to be sure
2 that they are bought into your vision and your priorities.
3 And, you know, obviously it is always more exciting to
4 build new things and then to take care of the things you
5 already have. And that is something I am confident you are
6 going to be able to do.

7 I think the Inspector General relationship has not
8 been what it could be. Talk to me a little about your view
9 of the role and impact of the Inspector General on the
10 agency. I think there has been a feeling the Inspector
11 General worked for the Architect of the Capitol as another
12 instrument of the Architect. That is not really the way it
13 works most other places.

14 Mr. Blanton. So I actually feel pretty lucky being in
15 a situation coming as an outsider because I would see
16 myself utilizing the Inspector General as a partner to help
17 me find areas that I would need to focus on. Inspectors
18 General in general have a dual role. They work for the
19 agency and they work for Congress. And so I respect that.
20 I have dealt with that throughout my career and I would see
21 myself dealing with the Architect of the Capitol's
22 Inspector General similarly.

23 The Chairman. And you are prepared to start this job
24 whenever confirmed?

25 Mr. Blanton. I have a period, a waiting period, I

1 have to do upon confirmation, so I am targeting mid-
2 January.

3 The Chairman. Anything you want to add?

4 Mr. Blanton. Other than it is been my pleasure, sir,
5 and I look forward to working with you.

6 The Chairman. Well, I want to thank you for joining
7 us today. As I said earlier, I intend to move this
8 nomination quickly. I will be meeting with the full
9 committee probably as early as next week. They will have
10 some questions that they might submit for the record. And
11 if you have questions for the record since we want to deal
12 with this as quickly as we can so we can get you started
13 early next year, please respond quickly to those questions
14 when you get them.

15 [The information referred to follows:]

16 [COMMITTEE INSERT]

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1 The Chairman. Thanks for appearing today. I was
2 pleased to see your family here with you, and hopefully
3 this will all go as well as we need it to because we need
4 you on board and we need the kind of leadership that the
5 President and the Congress both have believed up till this
6 point that you can provide. And I think the Senate when it
7 confirms will verify that one other time. Adjourned.

8 [Whereupon, at 10:26, the hearing was adjourned.]

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