



H.R. 5159 – Capitol Visitor Center Act of 2008

FLOOR SITUATION

H.R. 5159 is being considered on the floor under suspension of the rules and will require a two-thirds majority vote for passage. This legislation was introduced by Representative Robert Brady (D-PA) on January 29, 2008.

The House passed H.R. 5159 by voice vote on March 15, 2008. The Senate passed the bill, as amended, by unanimous consent on September 27, 2008.

H.R. 5159, as amended by the Senate, is expected to be considered on the floor of the House on October 2, 2008.

SUMMARY

CVC Oversight: H.R. 5159 gives oversight and policy review to the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration and to the House Committee on House Administration. The bill creates rules for the treatment of the Senate and House expansion space within the CVC, and stipulates that they may not be treated as a part of the CVC. The CVC expansion space given to the House and to the Senate will be considered to be extensions of their respective wings of the Capitol, and will be under their same control and authority.

Office of the Capitol Visitor Center: H.R. 5159 establishes the Office of the Capitol Visitor's Center (CVC) within the office of the Architect of the Capitol (AOC). The head of the CVC will be the Chief Executive Officer for Visitors Services (CEO), and this position is to be appointed by the AOC. The bill requires the CEO to install a gift shop and a food service operation within the CVC and gives the CEO the ability to contract for these services.

Capitol Visitor Center Revolving Fund: The bill establishes the Capitol Visitor Center Revolving fund within the Treasury of the U.S., which will consist of a Gift Shop Account and a Miscellaneous Receipts Account. All monies collected from the sales of the gift shop will be deposited into the Gift Shop Account, and all other monies, including those collected from all sales of food, all other profits received from the operation of the CVC, will be deposited into the Miscellaneous Receipts Account.

Capitol Guide Service: The bill transfers the authorities, assets, contracts, records, property, and personnel, of the Capitol Guide Service to the Office of the Capitol Visitor Center, and places the Capitol Guide Service under the authority of the CEO. The employees of the Capitol Guide Service will continue to provide guided tours of the Capitol as well as the CVC without charge. The CEO will have authority over the content and format of all guided tours of the CVC and the Capitol.

Office of Congressional Accessibility Services: The legislation establishes the Office of Congressional Accessibility Services (CAS), which is to provide persons with disabilities, including visitors, Members of the House and Senate, and employees with access to the Capitol Complex. The CAS will be under the supervision and control of the Capitol Police Board. This Board will also appoint the Director of Accessibility Services, who will oversee the operations of the CAS.

Authorization Levels: The bill authorizes such sums as necessary to be appropriated to carry out the Act.

Miscellaneous Provisions: The Senate passed bill adds a provision that allows coins that are thrown into fountains on the Capitol grounds to be considered as gifts to the United State government and to be deposited in the Miscellaneous Receipts Account of the CVC Revolving Fund. It also allows the Architect of the Capitol to accept volunteer services for the CVC.



BACKGROUND

The proposal for a CVC began to take shape in the mid-1970s with the Architect of the Capitol issuing a report: "Toward a Master Plan for the United States Capitol." In 1991, Congress authorized funding for conceptual planning and design of a visitor center. In 1995, the design report was issued. Changes in security needs and other safety and accessibility considerations required revisiting and revalidating the 1995 report. The updated plan was presented to the Capitol Preservation Commission (CPC) members at a meeting on October 15, 1999. Decisions by the CPC members led to the start of pre-construction activities in the fall of 2001. The events of 9/11 necessitated some additional design changes and prompted Congress to provide all the necessary funding--an additional \$100 million--to move the project into construction.

Physically, the CVC encompasses 580,000 square feet on three levels below ground and includes 170,000 square feet for House and Senate expansion space. It is an area roughly three quarters the size of the Capitol. The project footprint covers 5 acres (approximately 193,000 square feet), larger than the footprint of the Capitol. Excavation required the removal of 60,000 truckloads of soil (600,000 cubic yards). The structure is supported by 135 steel columns and 50 concrete columns. The 135 steel columns used weigh as much as 20 tons each.

The CVC was originally expected to be completed in December 2005, however the completion of the CVC was delayed due to unforeseen site conditions during utility relocation and excavation, and additional work prompted by the events of 9/11 (which added more than \$140 million in additional costs). The expected finish date is in the fall of 2008. The overall project budget is \$548 million.

COST

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimates that operating the Capitol Visitor's Center as required by the bill would cost \$25 million from appropriations for 2009, which is the center's first full year of operation. CBO anticipates that the cost to maintain the CVC, and employ about 275 guides and other workers will rise to \$37 million annually by 2013. CBO estimates that total costs over the 2009-2013 period would be \$166 million.

STAFF CONTACT

For questions or further information contact Brianne Miller at 6-2302.