



# Design Freedom for Federal Architecture

## The Challenge

Requiring classical and traditional architecture as the preferred federal style limits innovation and sidelines the voices of local communities. Similarly, moving forward with major changes to historic landmarks without a transparent public process undermines accountability and responsible preservation.

## The Ask

Support the Democracy in Design Act (H.R. 1584/S. 2891) and oppose any efforts to remove local control, hinder design freedom.

Support the People's White House Historic Preservation Act (H.R. 6761) and restore public input.

## More Information

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## BACKGROUND

The American Institute of Architects (AIA) is deeply concerned by recent developments involving federal architecture design mandates, the ongoing demolition of the White House East Wing, and the possibility of further destruction and design of federal buildings outside of the longstanding processes that protect historic buildings, encourage innovation and cultural preservation, and provide public oversight.

The Trump administration issued an Executive Order in August 2025, "Making Federal Architecture Beautiful Again," which establishes classical and traditional architecture as the preferred design for federal public buildings. Simultaneously, the White House began the full demolition of the East Wing in October 2025 to make way for a new 90,000-square-foot ballroom and announced the closing of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

In response, AIA issued a formal condemnation of the executive order, the demolition of a historic public landmark, the absence of transparent process, and the lack of public engagement. Parallel concerns have emerged regarding federally influenced renovations and closures at the Kennedy Center, prompting additional legal scrutiny over transparency, public input, and adherence to preservation frameworks. AIA and partners also filed a lawsuit to halt the project

## WHAT IS DESIGN FREEDOM?

AIA supports the General Services Administration's (GSA) Guiding Principles and the fundamental importance of design freedom. Our members believe federal buildings must respond to the needs of the people and communities they serve and reflect the nation's cultural, regional, and historical character. Mandating specific architectural styles undermines this goal by stifling innovation and limiting local input. The GSA's Design Excellence Program—grounded in the Guiding Principles—successfully delivers high-quality, community-focused federal buildings and should be protected.

AIA is also deeply concerned about federal actions that bypass transparent public review, including the demolition or alteration of significant public landmarks without proper oversight. Such actions erode public trust and weaken responsible stewardship of our shared civic heritage. AIA strongly opposes any policy that removes local control, imposes official federal design preferences, or limits accountability in the treatment of historic public buildings.

## CONGRESSIONAL ASK

AIA supports legislative efforts to codify the Guiding Principles through the Democracy in Design Act (H.R. 1584/S. 2891), which protects local control, design freedom, and community heritage.

Additionally, AIA supports the People's White House Historic Preservation Act (H.R. 6761), which removes the White House's statutory exemption from the National Historic Preservation Act, requiring a public review process for all White House renovations.