



Democracy in Design Act

The Challenge

Mandating classical and traditional architecture as the official preferred style for federal buildings stifles innovation and harms local communities. By preventing individuals from shaping their built environment in ways that reflect their unique history, character, and aspirations, all style mandates undermine the American ideals of independence and self-determination.

The Ask

Support the Democracy in Design Act (HR 964/S 366) by cosponsoring the bill.

More Information

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BACKGROUND

In December 2020, the former president issued an executive order entitled “Promoting Beautiful Federal Civic Architecture” (EO 13967), which created an official preference for classical and traditional architecture for federal courthouses and other buildings over \$50 million. Shortly after taking office, President Biden revoked Executive Order 13967.

The Democracy in Design Act was championed by AIA who secured Rep. Titus (D-NV) to introduce the bill during the 116th Congress (2019–2020) to prevent future federal mandates on architectural design styles and to protect the voice of local communities.

AIA unequivocally opposes any attempt to mandate an official architectural style for federal buildings.

WHAT IS THE DEMOCRACY IN DESIGN ACT?

The Democracy in Design Act is bipartisan. Rep. Titus was joined by Rep. Mike Simpson (R-ID) and Rep. Buddy Carter (R-GA) as cosponsors in the 117th and 118th Congresses, respectively. In the US Senate, Sen. Van Hollen (D-MD) has introduced a companion bill joined by Sen. Lujan (D-NM) and Sen. Mike Braun (R-IN).

The Democracy in Design Act codifies the US General Service Administration’s “Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture” which prohibits a national design style and encourages the government to avoid uniformity in building design. Furthermore, the bill safeguards the GSA Design Excellence Program, increases transparency, and allows the program to evolve to meet future needs.

The Democracy in Design Act promotes innovation. By respecting regional design preferences, histories, and traditions, the bill encourages local architects to find design solutions that fit their context, make use of natural site advantages, and embody community values.

WHY IS THE DEMOCRACY IN DESIGN ACT NEEDED NOW?

Without clear legislation, a future president or Congress could mandate any architectural style that suits their personal preferences. The Democracy in Design Act depoliticizes federal architecture, keeping decision-making in the hands of individuals and communities rather than centralizing authority in Washington, DC.