



The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC
ATTN: Mr. Joe Grogan, Asst. to the President,
Domestic Policy Council Director

February 20, 2020

The American Institute of Architects
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Dear President Trump,

We, the undersigned former Presidents of the American Institute of Architects, write to ask you to reconsider your proposed Executive Order establishing a mandate for federal courthouses and other federal projects. The draft order directs these projects to be executed in neoclassic style of design. We strongly feel that the stipulation of a one-size-fits-all approach to building design would ultimately result in sub-optimal buildings.

This is true whether the design “style” is modern or classical. It is essential to embrace regional circumstances and culture. This investment should ultimately contribute to the evolving legacy of American life and liberty.

The investment of federal funds into public buildings demands an appropriate return on investment to the American people – the taxpayers. That return is not guaranteed by stipulating a singular design style; it is achieved by engaging in a rigorous process that engages the most qualified and experienced design and construction professionals. In fact, it is well-known that neoclassical design often equates to higher construction costs and extended time schedules for project completion.

For every great American architect with a legacy of classically designed buildings (like Jefferson, Latrobe, Walter and McKim) there is a counterpart with an equivalent legacy of modernism (like Sullivan, Wright, Saarinen and Kahn). Both groups contributed enormously to American cultural evolution. Please do not stifle that evolution by

executing this Order.

Architecture is not only a visual art, it is a public art, which embraces public input and dialogue. Every community is free to establish its own cultural expressions through the arts. In multicultural communities, the diversity of these expressions is key to the perception of urban vitality and creativity in America (Example: the GSA Architecture Excellence Program where local context and local participation are essential to design parameters).

Collectively, we implore you to encourage (not discourage) the engagement of American communities to continue to search for the freedom of expression. A mandate for neoclassicism, as proposed, will slow the national and community pace of progress and innovation.

Despite this administration's intended reduction of burdensome federal regulations and unnecessary expenses, this proposed order will result in the exact opposite outcome for municipalities, businesses, architects, engineers, construction managers, artists, and contractors.

Sincerely,

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