

Issue brief

The problem

Local stakeholders must maintain their influence over the design of federal buildings in their communities. The federal government should not circumvent the design process to assert one design style at the expense of community preferences.

The ask

Cosponsor the bipartisan Democracy in Design Act in the House and Senate.

For more information

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Democracy in Design Act

ANALYSIS

The *Democracy in Design Act* is bipartisan legislation that will ensure that communities across the country maintain a voice in the design of federal buildings in their areas.

In the House, this bill is cosponsored by Rep. Dina Titus (D-NV), Rep. Mike Simpson (R-ID), Rep. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) and Rep. Buddy Carter (R-GA). In the Senate, the bill is cosponsored by Sen. Chris Van Hollen (D-MD) and Sen. Ben Ray Lujan (D-NM).

The bill would codify the U.S. General Services Administration's (GSA) "1962 Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture," prohibiting the federal government from mandating any national design style. This ensures that no architectural style may be preferred nor prohibited by the federal government.

Officially maintaining a style-neutral position respects this country's regional differences, as various communities may have different preferences, topographies, and design traditions. It also encourages American architectural innovation.

Additionally, the *Democracy in Design Act* would safeguard the GSA's Design Excellence Program, which guides the GSA's process to acquire, design, and construct public buildings. The legislation directs the GSA to undergo enhanced formal rulemaking processes on any proposed changes to the Design Excellence Program, including an opportunity for the public to comment. This would increase transparency in the federal design process, while also allowing the program to evolve for modern needs.

BACKGROUND

AIA stands firmly against any federal mandate on architectural design style. There is no design style that is inherently more or less valuable than any other.

As exemplified in the GSA's Design Excellence Program, the federal government should continue a style-neutral approach that focuses on community-centered decision-making, demonstrated architectural skill, and public input for community-based federal building projects. AIA commends the Design Excellence Program as a guiding light for architectural practice. The diversity, innovation, and regional preferences visible in American architecture reflect our national ideals. Architecture should reflect the citizenry for which it's built.

