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Progress in Improving Energy Efficiency and Options for Decreasing Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Statement of Terrell G. Dorn, Director
Physical Infrastructure Issues

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Highlights

Highlights of GAO-08-917T, a testimony to the Committee on Rules and Administration, U.S. Senate

ARCHITECT OF THE CAPITOL

Progress in Improving Energy Efficiency and Options for Decreasing Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Why GAO Did This Study

In April 2007, GAO reported that 96 percent of the greenhouse gas emissions from the Capitol Hill Complex facilities—managed by the Architect of the Capitol (AOC)—resulted from electricity use throughout the complex and combustion of fossil fuels in the Capitol Power Plant. The report concluded that AOC and other legislative branch agencies could benefit from conducting energy audits to identify projects that would reduce greenhouse gas emissions. GAO also recommended that AOC and the other agencies establish a schedule for conducting these audits and implement selected projects as part of an overall plan that considers cost-effectiveness, the extent to which the projects reduce emissions, and funding options. AOC and the other agencies agreed with our recommendations.

This statement focuses on (1) the status of AOC's efforts to implement the recommendations in our April 2007 report and (2) opportunities for the Senate to decrease greenhouse gas emissions and associated environmental impacts. The statement is based on GAO's prior work, analysis of AOC documents, and discussions with AOC management.

What GAO Found

AOC has made some progress toward implementing the recommendations in GAO's April 2007 report, but opportunities remain. For example, AOC has prioritized a list of Capitol Hill buildings that need energy audits but has not developed a schedule for conducting the audits that explains the prioritization scheme or provides information on the anticipated costs. AOC prioritized the order of energy audits based on each building's energy use and has begun conducting the first of the audits. In addition, AOC has contracted with a private firm to conduct preliminary audits of the Senate office buildings that could lead to more targeted audits and eventually identify cost-effective projects that would decrease energy use and related greenhouse gas emissions. We believe that developing a more detailed schedule for future audits that includes an explanation of the prioritization scheme and cost estimates would assist the Congress in its appropriations decisions and facilitate the completion of additional audits. With respect to our recommendation that AOC implement selected projects as part of an overall plan to reduce emissions, AOC has implemented projects to reduce energy use and related emissions, but the projects were not identified through the processes we recommended. AOC could more fully respond to our recommendation by first completing the energy audits and then evaluating the cost-effectiveness and relative merits of projects that could further decrease the demand for energy.

The Senate's options for decreasing the greenhouse gas emissions and related environmental impacts associated with its operations fall into three main categories—implementing projects to decrease the demand for electricity and steam derived from fossil fuels, adjusting the Capitol Power Plant's fuel mix, and purchasing carbon offsets or renewable electricity from external providers. Of these options, efforts to decrease the demand for energy could lead to recurring cost savings through reductions in energy expenditures while the other options may prove less cost-effective and involve recurring expenses. However, a key challenge in identifying energy-saving opportunities results from limited data on the baseline level of energy use within each Senate building. Specifically, the meters for steam and chilled water no longer function or do not provide reliable data. In addition, the buildings are not equipped with submeters for electricity that, if installed, could enhance efforts to identify sections of the buildings that consume relatively high levels of energy. AOC has purchased but not installed new chilled water meters, is evaluating options for acquiring new steam meters, and plans to install submeters by February 2009.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on GAO-08-917T. For more information, contact Terrell G. Dorn at (202) 512-6923 or dornt@gao.gov.

Madam Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this hearing to discuss opportunities for enhancing energy efficiency and decreasing the carbon footprint of the Capitol Hill Complex. In April 2007, we reported that 96 percent of the greenhouse gas emissions from the Capitol Hill Complex resulted from purchased electricity (59 percent) and the combustion of fossil fuels in the Capitol Power Plant (37 percent).[1] The Architect of the Capitol (AOC) has jurisdiction over the day-to-day operations of facilities located in the complex. Because the vast majority of greenhouse gas emissions from the Capitol Hill Complex stem from energy use, our April 2007 report recommended that AOC and other legislative branch agencies conduct energy audits to identify projects that would reduce greenhouse gas emissions. We also recommended that AOC and other legislative branch agencies establish a schedule for conducting these audits and implement selected projects as part of an overall plan that considers the cost-effectiveness of the projects, the extent to which they reduce emissions, and options for funding them. AOC and the other agencies agreed with our recommendations.

In addition to the work we did for our April 2007 report, we analyzed the potential costs of fuel-switching from coal to natural gas at the Capitol Power Plant, as directed by the Chief Administrative Officer of the House of Representatives in the Green the Capitol Initiative.[2] Specific actions outlined in the initiative included purchasing electricity generated by renewable sources, purchasing carbon offsets, and directing AOC to adjust the fuel mix of the Capitol Power Plant so that the portion of its output

[1]GAO, *Legislative Branch: Energy Audits Are Key to Strategy for Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions*, GAO-07-516 (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 25, 2007). Major greenhouse gases include carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, and certain synthetic gases including hydrofluorocarbons emitted from refrigerants. Buildings within the Capitol Complex include the Senate Office buildings (Dirksen, Hart, and Russell), House Office Buildings (Cannon, Longworth, and Rayburn), U.S. Capitol Building and Grounds, the Capitol Power Plant, Library of Congress Buildings and Grounds, U.S. Capitol Police Buildings, and the U.S. Botanic Garden. The Capitol Power Plant provides steam and chilled water for heating and cooling the Capitol building and 23 surrounding facilities.

[2]GAO, *Economic and Other Implications of Switching from Coal to Natural Gas at the Capitol Power Plant and at Electricity-Generating Units Nationwide*, GAO-08-601R (Washington, D.C.: May 1, 2008).

consumed by the House is derived entirely from natural gas.[3] In May 2008, we recommended that, before adjusting the plant's fuel mix beyond the level directed by the initiative, AOC consult with its oversight committees in the Congress and evaluate the economic and environmental tradeoffs associated with the use of each fuel at the plant.

My statement today will focus on (1) the status of AOC's efforts to implement the recommendations in our April 2007 report and, (2) opportunities for the Senate to decrease greenhouse gas emissions, including the cost-effectiveness of decreasing demand for energy relative to other options such as fuel switching at the Capitol Power Plant or purchasing renewable electricity and carbon offsets. Today's remarks are based on our prior work, analysis of documents provided by AOC on its progress in responding to recommendations in our April 2007 report, and related discussions with AOC management.

Summary

The Architect of the Capitol has made some progress toward implementing the recommendations in our April 2007 report but more opportunities remain. For example, AOC has prioritized a list of Capitol Hill buildings that need energy audits but has not developed a schedule for conducting the audits that explains the prioritization scheme or provides information on the anticipated costs. With respect to energy audits, AOC is conducting an energy audit of the U.S. Capitol Police Buildings and Grounds and plans to use $400,000 of fiscal year 2008 funds for energy audits of the Capitol Building and the Ford House Office Building. AOC has also requested $1.4 million for additional energy audits in its fiscal year 2009 budget request. In addition, AOC has contracted with a private firm to conduct preliminary audits of the Senate Office Buildings that could lead to more targeted audits and eventually identify cost-effective projects that would decrease energy use and related greenhouse gas emissions. To more fully implement this recommendation, AOC would need to enhance its prioritized list of audits by providing a more detailed schedule for completing the audits. AOC also has an opportunity to more fully address our recommendation that it implement selected projects as part of an overall plan to reduce emissions that considers cost-

[3]According to the Department of Energy's Energy Information Administration, for a comparable amount of energy input, the amount of carbon dioxide emitted from burning natural gas is about half that emitted from burning coal. Carbon offsets are a measurable reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from a project in one location that is used to compensate for emissions occurring elsewhere.

effectiveness, the extent to which the projects reduce emissions, and funding options. Specifically, AOC has implemented numerous energy efficiency projects throughout the Capitol Complex but has not identified these projects through the process we recommended of first conducting energy audits and then implementing selected projects based on cost-effectiveness and other considerations. Projects underway or completed include upgrading lighting systems, replacing steam system components, conducting education and outreach, purchasing energy-efficient equipment and appliances, and installing new windows in the Ford House Office Building.

The Senate's options for decreasing Capitol Hill greenhouse gas emissions and related environmental impacts associated with its operations fall into three main categories—(1) implementing projects to decrease the demand for electricity and steam, (2) adjusting the Capitol Power Plant's fuel mix, and (3) purchasing carbon offsets or renewable electricity from external providers. Of these options, efforts to decrease the demand for energy could lead to a reduction in the Capitol Hill Complex carbon footprint and recurring cost savings through reductions in energy expenditures. On the other hand, the other options may involve recurring expenses which may be large enough to render them less cost-effective. If natural gas prices remain relatively high, fuel switching may prove particularly costly. As we reported in April 2007, a strategy for reducing emissions could include energy audits that identify and evaluate energy-efficiency and renewable-energy projects, and the evaluation of other projects that may fall outside the scope of energy audits, such as purchasing energy-efficient appliances and computers. Importantly, these steps could assist the Senate in addressing the largest sources of emissions—the consumption of purchased electricity and fossil fuel combustion in the Capitol Power Plant. However, a key challenge in identifying energy-saving projects for the Senate buildings results from limited data on the baseline level of energy use within each Senate building. Specifically, the Senate Office Buildings currently have meters provided by the local utility to track electricity use in each building, but the AOC-owned meters that track the consumption of steam and chilled water either no longer work or do not provide reliable data. In addition, the Senate buildings are not equipped with submeters for electricity that, if installed, could enhance efforts to identify sections of the buildings that consume relatively high levels of energy. AOC has purchased but not installed new chilled water meters, is evaluating options for acquiring new steam meters, and plans to install submeters by February 2009. In addition to decreasing the demand for energy, the Senate could require AOC to adjust the fuel mix at the Capitol Power Plant to rely more heavily on natural gas, which produces about

half as much carbon dioxide as coal when burned but also costs about four times as much for a comparable amount of energy input. As we estimated in May 2008, meeting the House of Representative's fuel-switching requirement would cost between $1.0 and $1.8 million in fiscal year 2008 and between $4.7 and $8.3 million over a five-year period. While we have not analyzed the potential costs of fuel switching at the Capitol Power Plant to meet the needs of the Senate, our estimates for the House may provide some indication of the potential costs of such a directive. Additionally, fuel-switching requirements could impose a recurring cost on AOC and may prove less cost-effective than implementing projects that decrease the demand for energy. Finally, the Senate could pay for electricity derived from renewable sources or purchase carbon offsets. Such steps could encourage emissions reductions outside of the Capitol Complex but would also impose a recurring cost on the Senate and may be less cost effective than decreasing the demand for energy.

Background

Energy audits typically identify information on projects that could address the consumption of fossil fuel and electricity as well as projects that could reduce emissions from other sources, such as leaks in refrigeration equipment. Energy audits also include information on the cost-effectiveness of projects and on the extent to which the projects could reduce emissions. This information can then be used to evaluate and select projects. The audits generally fall into three categories—preliminary, targeted, and comprehensive—and are distinguished by the level of detail and analysis required. Preliminary audits are the least detailed and provide quick evaluations to determine a project's potential. These audits typically do not provide sufficiently detailed information to justify investments but may prove useful in identifying opportunities for more detailed evaluations. Targeted audits are detailed analyses of specific systems, such as lighting. Comprehensive audits are detailed analyses of all major energy-using systems. Both targeted and comprehensive audits provide sufficiently detailed information to justify investing in projects.

Energy-saving projects that fall outside the scope of energy audits include efforts to enhance outreach and education efforts to curtail energy use by building occupants and purchasing high-efficiency appliances. Outreach and education efforts include providing information on how employees can conserve energy, such as AOC's "how-to guides" that detail cost-effective methods to save energy in the workplace. Efforts to curtail energy use include purchasing energy-efficient computer equipment and appliances, using information available from the Environmental Protection

Agency's Energy Star program or the Federal Energy Management Program (FEMP). Energy Star-qualified and FEMP-designated products meet energy-efficiency guidelines set by the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Energy and, in general, represent the top 30 percent most energy-efficient products in their class of products. These products cover a wide range of categories, including appliances and office equipment. According to the Energy Star program, office products that have earned the Energy Star rating use about half as much electricity as standard equipment and generally cost the same as equipment that is not Energy Star qualified.

AOC Has Made Some Progress toward Implementing GAO's Recommendations on Energy Audits and Implementing Projects that Decrease Emissions

AOC has made some progress toward implementing the two recommendations in our April 2007 report. First, AOC has taken steps to address our recommendation that it develop a schedule for routinely conducting energy audits by developing a prioritized list of buildings for which it plans to conduct comprehensive energy audits (see App. 1). Specifically, AOC is currently undertaking a comprehensive energy audit of the U.S. Capitol Police Buildings and Grounds and obtained a draft submission in May 2008 from the private contractor performing the audit. AOC also plans to use $400,000 of fiscal year 2008 funds to perform comprehensive energy audits of the Capitol Building and the Ford House Office Building, and says it will direct any remaining fiscal year 2008 funds to an audit of the Hart Senate Office Building.[4] Additionally, AOC has contracted with a private firm to conduct a preliminary energy audit of the Senate Office Buildings that could prove useful in identifying opportunities for more comprehensive and targeted evaluations.

AOC officials said that they developed the prioritized list of buildings to audit by comparing the amount of energy used per square foot of space in each building (referred to as energy intensity) and then placing the buildings that use relatively higher levels of energy at the top of the list. However, AOC's prioritized list does not provide information on the energy intensity of each building, an explanation of its prioritization scheme, or cost estimates. Furthermore, AOC has not developed a schedule for routinely conducting audits as we recommended in our April 2007 report. AOC officials said that they cannot complete a more

[4]AOC completed energy audits of the Capitol Building in 2001, and of the Rayburn and James Madison Buildings in May 2005. AOC has requested $1.4 million for energy audits in its fiscal year 2009 budget request.

comprehensive schedule because of uncertainty about the extent to which AOC will receive future appropriations to conduct the audits. We believe that developing a more detailed schedule for future audits along with an explanation of its prioritization scheme and cost estimates would assist the Congress in its appropriations decisions and facilitate the completion of additional audits.

Second, AOC can do more to fully address the second recommendation in our April 2007 report that it implement selected projects as part of an overall plan to reduce emissions that considers cost-effectiveness, the extent to which the projects reduce emissions, and funding options. In recent years, AOC has undertaken numerous projects throughout the Capitol Hill Complex to reduce energy use and related emissions, but these projects were not identified through the process we recommended. Projects completed or underway include upgrading lighting systems, conducting education and outreach, purchasing energy-efficient equipment and appliances, and installing new windows in the Ford building. Examples of projects in Senate office buildings include upgrading the lighting in 11 offices with daylight and occupancy sensors, installing energy efficiency ceiling tiles in the Hart building, and replacing steam system components. According to AOC, these efforts have already decreased the energy intensity throughout the Capitol Hill Complex. Specifically, AOC said that it decreased its energy intensity—the amount of energy used per square foot of space within a facility—by 6.5 percent in fiscal year 2006 and 6.7 percent in fiscal year 2007.

As AOC moves forward with identifying and selecting projects that could decrease energy use and related emissions, it could further respond to our recommendation by developing a plan that identifies the potential benefits and costs of each option based on the results of energy audits. Such a plan could build on AOC's existing Sustainability Framework Plan and its Comprehensive Emissions Reduction Plan for the Capitol Complex, which identify measures that could lead to improvements in energy efficiency and reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. Complementing these plans with information on projects identified through energy audits would further assist AOC in using the resources devoted to energy efficiency enhancements as effectively as possible.

Efforts to Further Reduce Energy Consumption May Prove More Cost-Effective Than Other Measures in Decreasing Emissions

The Senate has three primary options for decreasing greenhouse gas emissions and related environmental impacts associated with its operations. These include (1) implementing additional projects to decrease the demand for electricity and steam derived from fossil fuel; (2) adjusting the Capitol Power Plant's fuel mix to rely more heavily on natural gas, which produces smaller quantities of greenhouse gas emissions for each unit of energy input than the coal and oil also burned in the plant; and (3) purchasing renewable electricity or carbon offsets from external providers. Each option involves economic and environmental tradeoffs and the first option is likely to be the most cost-effective because the projects could lead to recurring cost savings through reductions in energy expenditures.

Regarding the first option, as we reported in April 2007, conducting energy audits would assist AOC in addressing the largest sources of emissions because the audits would help identify cost-effective energy-efficiency projects. In general, energy projects are deemed cost-effective if it is determined through an energy audit that they will generate sufficient savings to pay for their capital costs. These projects may require up-front capital investments that the Senate could finance through direct appropriations or contracts with utility or energy service companies, under which the company initially pays for the work and the Senate later repays the company with the resulting savings. Until AOC exhausts its opportunities for identifying energy-efficiency projects that will pay for themselves over a reasonable time horizon, this option is likely to be more cost-effective than the second two options, both of which would involve recurring expenditures.

In pursuing energy audits, AOC faces a significant challenge collecting reliable data on the baseline level of energy use within each Senate office building. Such data would help identify inefficient systems and provide a baseline against which AOC could measure potential or actual energy-efficiency improvements. First, while AOC has meters that track electricity use in each building, the meters that track the steam and chilled water used by each building no longer work or provide unreliable data. AOC officials said that they have purchased but not installed new meters to track the use of chilled water and are evaluating options for acquiring new steam meters. Installing these meters and collecting reliable data would enhance any efforts to identify potential energy saving measures. Second, AOC does not have submeters within each building to track the electricity use within different sections of each building. Such submetering would further assist in targeting aspects of the Senate buildings' operations that consume relatively high quantities of energy.

AOC said that it plans to install submeters for electricity, chilled water, and steam by February 2009.

A second option for decreasing greenhouse gas emissions would involve directing AOC to further adjust the fuel mix at the Capitol Power Plant to rely more heavily on the combustion of natural gas in generating steam for space heating. The plant currently produces steam using a combination of seven boilers—two that primarily burn coal, but could also burn natural gas, and five boilers that burn fuel oil or natural gas. The total capacity of these boilers is over 40 percent higher than the maximum capacity required at any given time, and the plant has the flexibility to switch among the three fuels or burn a combination of fuels. The percentage of energy input from each fuel has varied from year to year, with an average fuel mix of 43 percent natural gas, 47 percent coal, and 10 percent fuel oil between 2001 and 2007.

In June 2007, the Chief Administrative Officer of the House of Representatives released the Green the Capitol Initiative, which directed AOC to operate the plant with natural gas instead of coal to meet the needs of the House. The House Appropriations Committee subsequently directed GAO to determine the expected increase in natural gas use for House operations and the associated costs at the power plant that would result from the initiative. In May 2008, we reported that the fuel-switching directive should lead to a 38 percent increase in natural gas use over the average annual quantity consumed between 2001 and 2007. We also estimated that the fuel switching should cost about $1.4 million in fiscal year 2008 and could range from between $1.0 and $1.8 million depending on actual fuel costs, among other factors.[5] We also estimated that the costs would range from between $4.7 million and $8.3 million over the 2008 through 2012 period, depending on fuel prices, the plant's output, and other factors. While we have not analyzed the potential costs of fuel switching at the Capitol Power Plant to meet the needs of the Senate, our estimates for the House may provide some indication of the potential costs of such a directive. Additionally, AOC officials said that further directives to increase its reliance on natural gas in the plant could require equipment upgrades and related capital expenditures.

Our May 2008 report also found that decreasing the plant's reliance on coal could decrease greenhouse gas emissions by about 9,970 metric tons

[5]All of our cost estimates are in constant 2006 dollars.

per year at an average cost of $139 per ton and could yield other environmental and health benefits by decreasing emissions of nitrogen oxides, particulate matter, and pollutants that cause acid rain. While fuel switching could decrease emissions of carbon dioxide and other harmful substances, it would also impose recurring costs because natural gas costs about four times as much as coal for an equal amount of energy input. Thus, fuel switching may prove less cost-effective than decreasing the demand for energy.

Finally, a third option for the Senate to decrease greenhouse gas emissions and related environmental impacts includes purchasing electricity that is derived from renewable sources and paying external parties for carbon offsets. Neither of these activities would involve modifications to the Capitol Complex or its operations but could nonetheless lead to offsite reductions in emissions and related environmental impacts. Both options, if sustained, would result in recurring costs that should be considered in the context of other options for decreasing emissions that may prove more cost-effective.

Madam Chairman, this completes my prepared statement. I would be pleased to answer any questions that you or Members of the Committee may have.

For further information about this testimony, please contact Terrell Dorn at (202) 512-6923. Other key contributors to this testimony include Daniel Cain, Janice Ceperich, Elizabeth R. Eisenstadt, Michael Hix, Frank Rusco, and Sara Vermillion.

Appendix I: Prioritized List of Buildings for Comprehensive Energy Audits

Fiscal Year	Facility
2008	Capitol Building
	Rayburn House Office Building
	Hart Senate Office Building[a]
2009	Russell Senate Office Building
	Dirksen Senate Office Building
	Senate Underground Garage
	Senate Employees Child Care Center
	Webster Hall Page Dormitory
	Senate Furniture Warehouse
	Robert A. Taft Memorial
	CPP Boiler Plant
	CPP West Refrigeration Plant
	CPP Administration Building
	CPP Generator Building
	CPP East Refrigeration Plant
	CPP Storage (Butler) Building
2010	Ford House Office Building
	Longworth House Office Building
	East and West Underground Garages
	House Page Dormitory
	Cannon House Office Building
2011	Thomas Jefferson Building
	James Madison Memorial Building
	LOC Special Facilities Center
	Book Storage Modules
2012	Alternate Computer Facility
	U.S. Capitol Police Headquarters
	67 K Street
	Canine Facility
	Capitol Police Courier Acceptance Site
	John Adams Building
	BG Conservatory
	BG Administration Building
	BG Production Facility (Greenhouse)
	Construction Management Division

Fiscal Year	Facility
	CG Vehicle Maintenance Garage
	Supreme Court Building

Source: AOC.

[a]Hart is third in order for fiscal year 2008, if funding permits.

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Terrell (Terry) Dorn, came to GAO in 2001, primarily leading GAO's oversight work on the U.S. Capitol Visitor Center while assisting other GAO teams in a wide variety of issues related to construction and facilities management. Immediately prior to coming to GAO, Mr. Dorn spent over 10 years in the private sector as a facility manager and construction project manager for Fortune 500 companies in the specialty chemical and energy sectors. In addition, he spent 10 years as a civilian and an engineer officer with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, working on civil works and military construction projects both here and in Europe. Mr. Dorn received a Bachelor of Science in civil engineering from Virginia Military Institute. He is a licensed professional engineer in Virginia and has also received the Certified Facility Manager designation from the International Facility Management Association.