

Sense and Sensibility

The standstill on plans for extension of the West Front of the Capitol, caused by a stalemated House-Senate conference, is about to end, for better or worse.

The Senate has wisely put a restriction into the Legislative Appropriations bill that would prohibit the use of \$2 million (allocated previously) to begin working drawings for the highly controversial remodeling. Unless the House takes the same positive action, however, the extravagantly destructive scheme will go ahead when the bill is voted on. As a preservation sop, or swap, it is proposed to restore the old Senate Chamber. One Congressional hand giveth; the other taketh away.

Since the costly non-planning on Capitol Hill has consisted of the laying of one immense marble egg after the other—from the elephantine and already outgrown Rayburn Building to the questionably centralized and super-sized Madison Library—the wisdom of caution is incontrovertible. Even if the already executed East Front extension were not an esthetic dud, one would still plead for a stay in the name of sense, so little space gained for such outrageous expenditure; and sensibility, respect for the nation's No. 1 historic monument. The West Front is the last original William Thornton facade.

That this irreversible act should be taken by Congress when the Architect of the Capitol has begun a rational master study of the needs of Capitol Hill is both willful and perverse. In the name of art, history and just plain cost, this planning travesty should be stopped right now.