

Capitol Outrage

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for a first-step, working study of costs and methods of the most direct way of restoring the historic West Front. The next step is to do it.

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According to the Architect of the Capitol, the only way to prop up the crumbling West Front is with two restaurants, two cafeterias, two private dining rooms, conference, committee and document rooms, offices, a barber shop, a visitors' center—at a cost of \$45-million, up from \$34 million and no top in sight. At approximately \$300 a square foot of usable space, this is not exactly a bargain. It is, in fact, an outrage.

The whole gigantic boondoggle is an outrage in terms of history, architecture, construction, esthetics and economics. It is preposterous as preservation. The considered judgment of the American Institute of Architects, which prepared a feasibility study, and of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, backed by most of the country's experts, is that the only proper service of art and history is to restore the West Front as it is, not turn it into something that it isn't. To mutilate a national monument for an extravagant extension to provide space and facilities that belong elsewhere, at a price completely out of line with other construction, is inexcusable.

Even more inexcusable are the "esthetic improvements" that are part of the plan. Great monuments, particularly historical monuments, are made up of exactly those imperfections and eccentricities that record the passage of taste and time. To "improve" the documentation of the centuries is midget-minded murder. This same fiddling with the fragile reality of the past destroyed the East Front for an embalmed marble corpse. Strengthening the present facade will be difficult, because the structural weaknesses are serious, as any study of the engineering reports makes clear. But it will cost a lot less money and make a lot more sense than sabotage.

It is outrageous that this extravagant scheme should be proposed now, just after the President has announced a 75 per cent cutback on all Government construction to fight inflation. It is unthinkable that the Speaker of the House and the members of Congress should oblige Mr. Stewart, so-called Architect of the Capitol, with a \$2-million appropriation to get the destructive busy work going, against the informed and exasperated protests of most professional opinion in the United States. It is even more outrageous that in his stubborn adherence to his pet plan, Mr. Stewart and his henchmen have dismissed out-of-hand any alternate solution.

The final outrage is that the Capitol is allowed to deteriorate further while Mr. Stewart spends years trying to ram through his wrong-headed scheme. The only proper Congressional procedure is to vote considerably less than the \$2 million of the Stewart request