

# Arizona Daily Star®

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## Talk of new Capitol bubbles up anew

**By Daniel Scarpinato**

ARIZONA DAILY STAR

PHOENIX — Arizona's turbulent relationship with its state Capitol may have been destined from the beginning.

When the building was completed in 1901, newspaper stories quickly circulated that it was a scaled-down design of never-completed plans for a state Capitol in Mississippi.

"The Marble Palace," as it was called, wasn't good enough for Mississippi — but a miniaturized version was apparently deemed appropriate for the Territory of Arizona.

Within a decade, talk began about expansions — and that talk continues right up until today. Gov. Janet Napolitano said last month that she wanted to budget for a new Capitol, and in time for Arizona's centennial celebration in 2012. Though she's now backed away from the idea, lawmakers still say a new structure is needed.

But if history is any indication, that might be easier said than done. Over the past 100 years, dialogue about expanding or building a new Capitol has been a constant in Arizona.

Some plans — like the widely unpopular post-modern legislative buildings that bookend the original Capitol today — managed to become reality.

Several others — such as an exotic Arabian-like "Oasis" designed by Frank Lloyd Wright — barely saw the light of day.

But now some lawmakers say the Capitol is so unimpressive and unsuitable that millions should be spent on constructing a new one.

And though not without critics, that perennial discussion may now be gaining some momentum.

### "This is a dump"

Many lawmakers say the House and Senate complexes — completed in 1960 — don't meet the needs of today.

Back then, according to Rep. Jack Brown, a Democrat and the oldest member of the Legislature, lawmakers didn't have offices or secretaries, or even telephones.

Brown started in the Legislature in 1963, when the buildings were practically new. Before that, the Legislature met in the original Capitol building, now a

### Mini doc: Capitol Expense

Some in the Arizona Legislature want a new Capitol building. Who's going to pay for it? Star political reporter Daniel Scarpinato narrates.

### Watch the video Money

In her budget proposal, Gov. Janet Napolitano requested \$14 million to plan for a \$500 million Capitol complex. The proposal died during Senate negotiations, but Senate President Tim Bee says the topic could come back next year.

A House budget proposal allocates \$6 million for Capitol planning. House leaders are hoping the money makes its way into the state's final budget.

### past projects

Arizonans have helped foot the bill for some expensive projects over the years. The question, lawmakers say, is whether spending millions on a new Capitol is politically correct. Here are some examples from over the years of other costly projects, all of which included some public money:

- Proposed Downtown Tucson

museum. Today, Brown and others say the 1960s buildings need to go.

"This is a dump," says Phil Lopes, a Tucson Democrat and House minority leader.

"There's stains on the ceiling, cracks in the tile; these walls are like paper, and we're really crowded," he said in an interview from his dingy third-floor office.

The buildings, which face each other and are connected by an underground tunnel, are identical from the outside and have the same square footage — about 75,000. With twice as many members in the House as in the Senate, crowding is a visible problem in the House.

### **Rep. Paton: A matter of pride**

One member who is particularly passionate about building a new Capitol is Rep. Jonathan Paton, a Tucson Republican who toured many state capitols with his parents when he was a child.

"The Capitol is terrible," says Paton, standing in the courtyard between the House and Senate. "Look at it. It's got this kind of crazy, you know, socialist realism bunker-style thing going on. It's ugly, and it's too small."

Unlike other lawmakers, Paton argues for a new building less on the basis of practicality and more from the standpoint of state pride.

"With all due respect to the Capitol mall thing, this whole area is kind of a hodge-podge," he said.

Lopes agrees.

"We're the fastest-growing state in the nation, and we've got this ugly Capitol," he said.

And in fact, as Phoenix has grown, Arizona now holds the title as the most populated state capital in the nation.

### **Frank Lloyd Wright's "Oasis"**

What lawmakers are talking about is nothing new. In 1955, their predecessors considered a 20-story glass high-rise with legislative wings to replace the entire Capitol.

Plans called for it to be constructed only 16 feet from the entrance of the historic Capitol, which would have pretty much blocked the original building.

Legendary architect Frank Lloyd Wright was so upset by the high-rise proposal that he drafted one of his own — an exotic plan called "The Oasis."

Wright proposed the Capitol be moved to Tempe and housed in an Arabian tentlike building. The concept was ridiculed by the media, but his opposition was enough to kill the high-rise plans.

"It was completely outrageous, and I think it was meant to be," says Michael Carman, director of the Arizona Capitol Museum for 20 years before retiring in 2004. "Lloyd was responding to the fact that the Legislature was really considering building a whole new structure. (The high-rise) was, in his mind, truly ludicrous."

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- University of Phoenix Stadium, Glendale (2006): \$455 million,
- University of Arizona Student Union Memorial Center (2002): \$59 million.
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- Arizona State Capitol (1901): \$100,000.

### **TIMELINE**

January 1889

The Legislative Assembly of the Arizona Territory votes to move the Capitol from Prescott to Phoenix, where it rents space in Phoenix City Hall.

February 1889

The Legislature forms a commission to locate a site for a Capitol. West Washington Street is chosen. The owners donate the land in hopes of selling houses in the surrounding area.

1893

Congress turns down Arizona's bid for statehood, slowing plans for Capitol construction.

1897

The desired land is finally turned over to the Arizona Territory. The Legislature approves issuing \$100,000 in bonds to pay for construction.

1898

A design by Texas architect James Riley Gordon is selected. The design is strikingly similar to a more elaborate structure — "The Marble Palace" — rejected in Mississippi.

1901

Carman says he supports building a new Capitol.

"Arizona can be pretty proud of the original building," he says, with its "Winged Victory" statue on top of its copper dome. "It reflects the texture and sense of the Arizona Territory. It's modest, very strong and at the time quite popular."

A new building should be something "that doesn't copy the old-style decorations or materials in the building," he said. "Something that reflects Arizona today."

### **Costs are always an issue**

Not everyone is crazy about the concept of a new Capitol.

"It's not on my radar," said Tucson Sen. Jorge Luis Garcia, a Democrat. "(The buildings) ain't falling down. There's a lot of other priorities in line before this."

And Napolitano essentially said the same thing when she backed away from the idea this month.

"It was never the top priority, and as you can see, was not a deal-breaker," she said. But she added in response to a follow-up question, "At some point you either have to include the maintenance of this complex or make some changes. But I'm more interested in schools, universities, teachers, roads; those are the kinds of things we need to focus on."

But Lopes says all Arizona's needs can, and should, be met.

"The question should be: Do we need it and how's the best way to get the money?"

The answer, he says: "Stop doing tax cuts."

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1912

Arizona becomes a state.

1918-1919

Due to overcrowding, an addition is built to the west of the original building.

1938

Another addition on the west side of the building is completed, bringing the size of the Capitol from 40,000 square feet in 1900 up to 123,000.

1940

A 12-story tower is proposed, as well as completion of the front staircase. The plan is never realized.

1955

With the Capitol still congested, the Legislature considers a 20-story glass high-rise with legislative wings to replace the entire Capitol. Plans call for it to be constructed only 16 feet from the entrance of the historic Capitol, which would have blocked the original building.

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