

ROLL CALL



THE NEWSPAPER OF CAPITOL HILL SINCE 1955

THURSDAY, JULY 12, 2007

Quaker Peace Lobby Goes Green

By John McArdle
ROLL CALL STAFF

When House Chief Administrative Officer Dan Beard was charged by Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) to “green the Capitol,” he said one of his first goals was to locate a “greening pioneer” who could show Congress just what was possible.

He didn’t have to travel too far.

Just across Second Street Northeast from the Hart Senate Office Building lies the recently renovated offices of the Friends Committee on National Legislation, the Quaker group known as Washington, D.C.’s largest peace lobby. After a recent multimillion-dollar overhaul, the FCNL has transformed its office space into what it’s now calling Capitol Hill’s “first green building.”



Tom Williams/Roll Call

Clockwise from above right: House Chief Administrative Officer Dan Beard (left) and FCNL spokesman Jim Cason examine the structure’s green roof; FCNL Executive Secretary Joe Volk shows off the building’s exterior; and The Friends Committee on National Legislation building in a pre-1950s photo when it was a corner store.



Photo Courtesy Friends Committee on National Legislation



Tom Williams/Roll Call



Tom Williams/Roll Call

FCNL Executive Secretary Joe Volk talks about the plumbing in the environmentally friendly building.

On his second visit to the facility this week, Beard, who is in the midst of implementing Pelosi's new Green the Capitol Initiative, said a tour of a green building can be "an eye-opening experience" for those who may be skeptical about climate change and global warming. And as he works to achieve Pelosi's goals of operating the House in a carbon-neutral environment by the end of the 110th Congress and cutting the carbon footprint of the House in half in 10 years, Beard said having a model of sustainability just a stone's throw from the Capitol's front door will be an easy way to show Members what the future could hold.

Today the FCNL is hosting an open house to show off its green digs, and more than 25 Members of Congress are expected to take a tour of the facility, which was once two separate Civil War-era row houses.

Eben Burnham-Snyder, spokesman for Rep. Ed Markey (D-Mass.), said his boss is one Member who plans to take a tour of the Quaker's building this evening.

"Everybody is really supportive of the Speaker's initiative to green the Capitol," Burnham-Snyder said. "If we're telling people they need to green their own homes and businesses, we should be greening the Hill first."

Beard, who also is expected to appear at tonight's event, said when he first visited the facility he immediately was impressed with how the lobbying shop dealt with the challenges of bringing a historic structure, with its many preservation requirements, in line with the latest in environmentally friendly practices and technologies.

The building has a vegetated roof that helps control rain runoff, provides additional insulation and minimizes the facility's contribution to rising urban temperatures. It also has a geothermal heating and cooling system that uses 45 percent less energy than a standard HVAC system. The building also makes extensive use of furniture and carpeting made from recycled content and incorporates motion-sensing and high-efficiency lighting.

But the obvious challenge for Beard, for whom Pelosi's Green the Capitol Initiative was one of his first priorities after being appointed this past spring, is to find a way to apply the lessons of the FCNL—and other green buildings—on the massive scale of the House complex.

The FCNL building has just under 10,000 square feet of space, while in the House, Beard is responsible for some 6 million square feet. The FCNL is home to about 40 employees; the House has around 7,000.

Some greening programs translate more easily than others through such orders of magnitude.

For instance, the FCNL building is equipped with shower facilities for employees "because green buildings aren't just the physical place, they are also how people get to them, how people leave them and how people live and work in the buildings," said Joe Volk, executive secretary of the FCNL. "And if you want people to commute to work by bike you've got to be able to shower and change your clothes."

In Beard's Green the Capitol report, one recommendation is to provide one gym lock-

er for every long-term bicycle parking space and provide at least four showers in each House building.

But even if Beard follows through with other options such as planting vegetation to cover the acres of roof space on top of House offices, the question remains whether Members would be ready to embrace such a change.

"I think dealing with behavior and acceptance is the biggest problem that we have in terms of dealing with greening the Capitol," Beard said. "It's everything from getting people out of the car and taking mass transit to work or riding a bike ... to operating their computer in a different way and turning it off, to the kind of paper we use and ultimately the HVAC system we have and how you maintain it."

"I think one of the deterrents to people getting into green work has been the myth that if you do it it's going to be experimental, if you do it it's going to be ugly and uncomfortable, if you do it it's going to cause you to give up things that make your life good," Volk said. "I think coming to this building can show you if you do it it's beautiful, if you do it it's comfortable and it can actually improve your quality of life."

"And instead of costing you money it can save you money," Beard added.

While the Quaker lobby spent a little more than \$6 million on its overhaul effort, no final price tag has been set on the Green the Capitol Initiative, although the House version of the legislative branch appropriations bill currently includes \$3.9 million in new funding for the effort and redirected other dollars so officials can study ways to create a more environmentally friendly House.

But Beard has asserted throughout the development of his Green the Capitol report that investments now in energy-saving technologies will lead to cost savings in the not-too-distant future. Volk said his group expects to recoup their \$6 million investment within the next five years, while Beard has said the cost of energy-saving technologies by the House could be repaid in as little as four years.

GOP leaders on Congressional administrative issues have in general supported the Green the Capitol Initiative but have preached caution on some points of Beard's plan, including some of the upfront costs and the possibility that the House soon could be purchasing carbon offset credits in the domestic market. Some Republicans have equated the purchase of offset credits with "buying indulgences on an unregulated market."