



## The Patriot-News

### NEW U.S. COURTHOUSE

#### Politicians want GSA to defend site plan COURTHOUSE

Saturday, February 02, 2008

**BY BRETT LIEBERMAN**  
Of Our Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON - They've tried in private. They've written restrictions into law.

Now, state lawmakers will put federal officials in the witness chair to publicly defend their plans for the new \$130 million federal courthouse in Harrisburg.

The GSA is planning to build it at the site of the existing courthouse at Third and Walnut streets, much to the dismay of local officials.

Local lawmakers have scheduled a Feb. 11 hearing on the project at Harrisburg Area Community College's Midtown campus. They hope to exert pressure on the U.S. General Services Administration, the agency overseeing the project.

Mayor Stephen R. Reed and several lawmakers have said that the courthouse should be built at the intersection of Sixth and Reily streets, saying it would spur much-needed development.

"I want to have GSA on the record as to their specific reasons, and I want to give the mayor an opportunity to lay down the case for having the courthouse someplace other than center city," said U.S. Sen. Arlen Specter, R-Pa.

Specter said he wants a better explanation of the costs and impact of the plan to demolish the federal building, temporarily relocate courtrooms, and the potential impact of developing the Sixth and Reily neighborhood.

"When there's a fuller understanding by the public, there will be considerable support for the mayor's position," Specter said.

Specter is spearheading the hearing with the support of U.S. Sen. Bob Casey Jr., D-Pa., and U.S. Rep. Tim Holden, D-Schuylkill County.

"This will bring out into the public what we still think is the arrogance of GSA," Holden said.

In December, state lawmakers put language in a spending bill that blocks the GSA from spending on the project until it does a report comparing different courthouse sites.

GSA officials had no comment about the hearing or others questions, and referred inquiries to congressional committees.

"We look forward to sharing our site evaluation and decision first with senators Specter and Casey and congressman Holden," a GSA statement said. "Following that discussion, GSA will share this information with the Harrisburg community."

Lawmakers want to make GSA officials defend their decisions and gain community input. The hearing will include testimony by Reed, GSA officials and community leaders.

The lawmakers first will take another crack at reaching a compromise with GSA officials during a meeting scheduled next week.

The language Casey, Holden and Specter included in the spending bill requires GSA to report to congressional committees later this month.

"We obviously haven't gotten their attention ... so we'll keep trying," Holden said.

BRETT LIEBERMAN: 202-383-7833 or [blieberman@patriot-news.com](mailto:blieberman@patriot-news.com)

©2008 The Patriot-News

© 2008 PennLive.com All Rights Reserved.