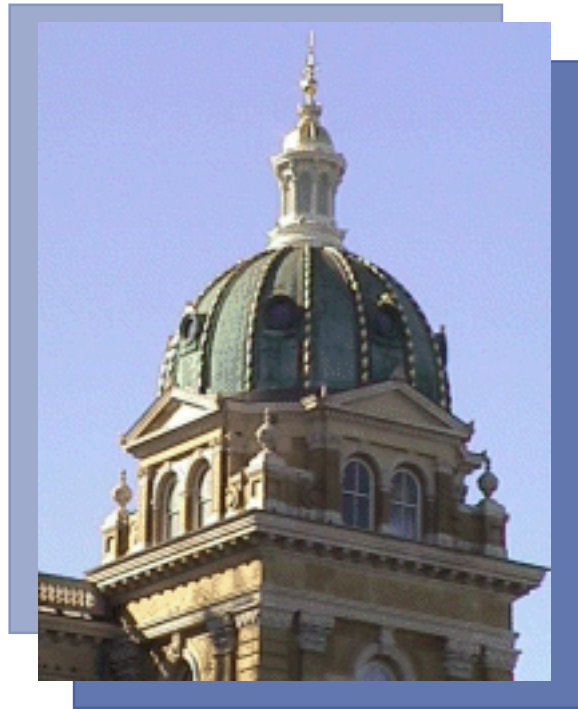


Stateline

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Lawmakers and public safety officials throughout the Midwestern region are considering ways to boost security at their capitol buildings. Installing metal detectors and state-of-the-art surveillance cameras, closing access to certain entrances and bolstering the police presence are a few ways states might try to make their capitols safer. Several measures already have been implemented in the wake of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. (Photo: state of Iowa)



Inside

Around the Region

Affordable housing, strike in Minnesota

Feature story

Legislators review their first year on the job

Feature Story

Budget cuts will likely hit universities

Feature Story

Assessing the agro-terror threat

Feature Story

Accountability in business subsidy programs

Profile

Wisconsin Sen. Richard Grobschmidt

First Person

The Honorable Pat Lorjé of Saskatchewan

CSG News & Events

LSA conference, MLC leaders set to meet

MLC Issue Briefs

Luring biotech companies, helping kids read

Next month

A preview of the 2002 legislative sessions

Safety at the capitol

States seek comfortable balance between security and accessibility

by Tim Anderson

The measures appear to have wide bipartisan support along with the backing of most constituents. And Iowa Senate President Mary Kramer believes it is the right thing to do.

Still, she doesn't look forward to the changes in security and building access that are expected to be made at the Iowa Capitol for the 2002 legislative session.

"I hate doing it," the Republican from West Des Moines says. "I want the public to feel like their government is accessible to them, and that there are no barriers between the public and government. The Capitol is their house, and I fear some of these security changes will give some perception of a barrier.

"But the public is saying it's about time. The Capitol is one of the most beloved and attractive places for our citizens to come visit. They need to feel safe there as well. In the spring, we have hundreds of schoolchildren coming to watch the legislative process and learning with us. It behooves us to take certain measures of security."

Since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks and the subsequent military action in Afghanistan, momentum for plans to make state capitols and

other public buildings safer has increased dramatically. Many states in the region already have reports with suggested building security recommendations. Some proposals have been implemented. Many others have not, though, due at least in part to a perceived lack of urgency in the past and a reluctance to limit public access in any way.

Circumstances, and seemingly attitudes, have changed. In Iowa, plans are to enact many of the security measures suggested in a study done by the U.S. Secret Service. By January, Kramer expects a new screening process at the Capitol in which visitors are checked by guards and metal detectors.

Other likely changes include the installation of surveillance cameras and protective window coatings along with the implementation of a new way of screening mail sent to the Capitol. The state also will move ahead with previously agreed-upon plans for a new door entry system that includes key cards, new locks and employee badges.

"We owe our employees a safe workplace; that is a value we should hold," Kramer says. "There was anxiety among them even before Sept. 11. So I think we got a sense of urgency after the attacks, but we had felt for some time that what we were doing was not adequate for the amount of assets that we had in the Capitol."

Heightened alert

Several immediate responses related to capitol security followed the catastrophic events in New York and Washington, D.C. One was an increased presence of police around state capitols. In Indiana, uniformed troopers temporarily began manning various parts of the Statehouse. It was a measure welcomed by many employees, and the newly formed Indiana Counter-Terrorism and Security Council promised to look at permanent measures to make the building and its workers safer.

"We have a great wealth of experts who can help people learn how to reduce risks," says Democratic Lt. Gov. Joe Kernan, who was appointed to chair the council, which also includes Democrat House Speaker John Gregg and Republican

(Please turn to page 7)

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Ideas for security include metal detectors, larger police presence

(Continued from page 1)

Senate President Pro Tempore Robert Garton.

Among the security measures taken in Illinois were a shutdown of access to parking lots around the Statehouse and a closer monitoring of trucks inside the Capitol complex. In the future, a thorough review of safety measures may take place as a result of the Sept. 11 attacks — an assessment that would include discussion of adding metal detectors and X-ray devices along with new cameras and an altered entry system for employees.

“Maybe now they’ll realize it could happen here,” Rep. Mike Boland, a Democrat from East Moline, told the *Rock Island Argus* soon after the terrorist strikes. “I believe this will shock us into a little action.”

Ohio public safety officials and lawmakers recently were given a list of recommended actions by the State Building Security Review Committee. Several proposals seek to better control access in and around public buildings through incorporation of a visitor badge system, the closing of certain entrances, an upgrade of current camera equipment, and the purchase of screening machines that could check for both organic and metallic items at building entries.

Ohio Republican Lt. Gov. Maureen O’Connor, who served as chair of the committee, says such additional security measures are needed to guard the state’s public facilities from attack — especially a high-profile building like the Capitol.

“Look and see what they do in Washington; people are used to security at the monuments and buildings that are ‘destination’ places for people,” she says. “We have to take a look at implementing procedures that will enhance security at our Capitol, which is a destination for many people as well.

“It’s a beautiful building and a history lesson itself. In order to preserve that, I think people will not feel imposed upon or intimidated by having to experience additional security.”



Security at public buildings such as the Illinois Capitol has become a priority issue in recent months. (Photo: state of Illinois)

The committee also addresses another major public safety concern: mail handling and processing. Reports of anthrax infections already caused the state to develop training workshops for all state employees and agencies. Members of the building safety committee recommend enhancing such training exercises along with having all mail and parcels searched by X-ray.

Perhaps the most visible and welcome change in security at Ohio’s public buildings has been the greater presence of highway patrol officers, an arrangement that the committee believes should continue.

“I can’t tell you how many people are grateful that the patrol is present; they feel more protected,” O’Connor says. “But it does cost money. Keeping the highway patrol at its current level for the next month would cost \$800,000.”

Nebraska public safety officials want to increase the presence of police around the state Capitol as well. Lori McClurg, director of the Nebraska Department of Administrative Services, says the state’s biggest initiative is to make Capitol security part of the state patrol.

“That will mean they will have more training, they will have the ability to arrest, and they will be more visible around the building,” McClurg says.

As in Ohio, upgrades in police patrol of the building will mean additional funding. McClurg says her department will need to secure more dollars from the Unicameral Legislature in order to move forward with the change.

Architectural challenges

When attempting to improve security at state capitols, lawmakers and public safety officials face the challenge of dealing with old, sometimes antiquated buildings.

“We have a very historic building, one that many would say is not functional for doing business today,” Kramer says.

McClurg adds: “In this day, with the security concerns we now have, I don’t think you would design a building like this.”

For example, one proposal is to build a wall around the perimeter to enhance security at the Nebraska Capitol — an idea actually included in the original architectural plans.

But the price tag to make the wall of limestone, which was used to construct the 70-year-old building, is \$5 million, leading many to believe

such construction is “nearly cost-prohibitive,” McClurg says.

The state of Kansas is preparing to embark on a \$120 million renovation of its Capitol. Before the Sept. 11 attacks, a consultant already had been hired to determine what

additional safety measures could be taken as part of a restoration of the Statehouse.

“Now, security has certainly become a lot more of a top-drawer issue,” says Republican Senate President Dave Kerr, who is serving both on a newly formed Kansas legislative committee on security and the Joint Committee on Building Construction.

The state took several precautions in the weeks following the attacks to guard the outside of the building, including the construction of barriers to prevent vehicular access under the Statehouse arches.

Kerr says renovation plans might include construction of an underground parking garage, and that officials might decide to limit the number of vehicles allowed to circle the Capitol.

So how will renovation planners weigh the emerging concerns about building security with the state’s long tradition of openness and access to the Capitol?

“That’s a hard balance, and that’s one we’re going to debate,” the Republican from Hutchinson says. “Right now, we’ve got multiple points of entry to the building that are not monitored. Once we redo the Capitol, do we want to maintain that, or do we want to have card entry for employees and allow public access by one or two openings? That would make things a lot more secure, but it diminishes the openness to the public. And most of us are looking for more people to come in, not fewer.”

The dilemma faced by Kansas policymakers is similar to what is being seen around the country. While confident that upgrades in state-house security will make visitors feel safer, legislators say the tricky part in instituting such changes will be to maintain the feelings of openness and accessibility that the public experienced in the past. 🚀