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## Latest Trends in State Capitols: A Sample Book Review

**State capitol buildings** have been the most consistently controversial construction projects in the nation's history. This is because state legislatures, the lawmakers in charge, have always had a difficult time justifying expenditures on their own buildings.

Some of the early capitol buildings, often called state houses, were so poorly built they lasted but a few decades. Many were replaced by necessity—fires destroying the old capitols in Kentucky (1824), Alabama (1849), Texas (1881), Pennsylvania (1897), North Dakota (1930), Oregon (1935), and many others. Often, the replacement structures were viewed as so opulent and ornate as to bring criticism for wasteful spending. Texas (1888) avoided some of the controversy when it swapped, for the construction of the capitol in Austin, three million acres in the Texas Panhandle, acreage that would become the famous XIT Ranch. Mississippi (1903) used back taxes owed by the Illinois Central Railroad. Kentucky's fourth and current capitol (1910) was partly paid with federal funds, reparations over damages caused by Union soldiers during the Civil War.

As scrutiny of public expenditures increased, money for monumental structures dried up. Washington's capitol in Olympia (1928) and West Virginia's in Charleston (1932) were the last of the great classical structures.

The two most recently built capitols are Arizona's (1974) and Florida's (1978) office towers, both casting long shadows over their small nearby predecessors. Non-traditional capitols in Hawaii (1959) and New Mexico (1966) are relatively modest in scope. The other relatively young capitols are of the office-tower variety (Nebraska, 1932); simplified art deco style (Oregon, 1937); or both (Louisiana, 1932, and North Dakota, 1935). No state capitol has been built for thirty years. Alaska's converted-warehouse is unlikely to be replaced by a real capitol anytime soon.

In his lavishly illustrated book **Fifty State Capitols: The Architecture of Representative Government** (Coho Publishing, ISBN 978-0-9830292-0-5, 128 pages trade paperback, \$27.95 list price), Jim Stembriidge traces the history of all fifty state capitols. ([www.fiftystatecapitols.com](http://www.fiftystatecapitols.com))

Stembriidge points out that several states, including Tennessee, Connecticut, and Maine have expanded their capitols by building underground passageways to nearby structures, thus keeping their ornate, traditional capitols and having efficient office space, too. New additions sit next to the New Jersey capitol and under the Virginia capitol (preserving Thomas Jefferson's original design).

"And," Stembriidge says, "in a triumph of political will, Oklahoma Governor Frank Keating led the effort to complete that state's capitol dome (2002), after nearly a century's delay."



Oklahoma's new capitol dome in Oklahoma City

### Fifty State Capitols: The Architecture of Representative Government

by Jim Stembriidge

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276 color photographs by the author

Glossary, index, and references

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