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Renovations complete

Under 10-year project, area was first interior space

By Chris Moon

The Capital-Journal

The Senate chamber opened for business on Monday, the first major interior completion of the ongoing 10-year renovation project of the Statehouse.

Senators applauded the work.

"It's more than I expected," said Senate Majority Leader Derek Schmidt, R-Independence. "This renovation is about having a Statehouse suitable for the next 100 years. If the rest of the renovation turns out as well as this portion has, it will be money well spent."

The project is estimated to cost \$162 million. Statehouse renovators on Monday requested an additional \$16.2 million be added to the budget, partially because of inflation during the past year as steel and energy prices continue to rise.

The Legislative Coordinating Council, which is made up of the Legislature's top seven leaders, approved the recommendation on Monday.

Workers hustled to complete the Senate chamber before the start of the 2006 session, which begins Jan. 9.

The chamber has been under construction since the close of the 2005 session in May. It forced senators to conduct a June special session in the old Supreme Court chamber in the Statehouse.

On Monday, however, the state took control of the Senate chamber and began moving in furniture.

Senators' original 1885 desks, handmade from wild Kansas cherry wood, were returned to the chamber, positioned in a horseshoe shape as a return to an older era. Most recently, the desks had been in a square formation.

Also, the ceiling has been repainted, new chandeliers and carpeting installed, and the rear office space for Senate leadership was reconfigured.

"It's magnificent," said Statehouse architect Barry Greis, who is overseeing the 10-year project, which is scheduled to wrap up in 2010.

The next scheduled completions are Friday and Jan. 3, when the first and second floors of the east wing will be



finished. Those floors will house Senate offices.

Construction now is starting on the west wing of the building. Some House members have had their offices moved across the street to the Docking State Office Building to accommodate the construction. But talks continue among legislative leaders to try to return as many members as possible to the Statehouse for the legislative session.

Already as part of the Statehouse renovation project, a two-level underground parking garage has been completed on the north side of the Statehouse. The Senate chamber is the first interior room of the Statehouse to be renovated.

Search prolonged

Also in legislative action on Monday, the Legislative Coordinating Council prolonged its search for a legislative attorney.

State lawmakers agreed this year to hire a part-time attorney after the Kansas Supreme Court ordered the Legislature to add millions of dollars to public school funding. State officials say they have six applicants for the job but will continue the search during the 2006 legislative session.

Chris Moon can be reached at (785) 233-7470 or chris.moon@cjonline.com.



Anthony S. Bush/The Capital-Journal
Derrick Willard, left, and Matt Gockel, employees of BA Designs, tape down boards to protect the new carpet in the Senate chamber at the Statehouse before heavy furniture was moved through the chamber.
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