State Finally Accepts Bid on Old Capitol Restoration

La. Commission Reverses Itself on Issue

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(Times-Picayune Staff Correspondent)

BATON ROUGE, La. — The Capital Construction and Improvement Commission Wednesday reversed itself by rescinding a previous action and voted to accept a low bid of $672,000 received in August to restore the old state Capitol here.

It marked the second allocation in little more than a decade (1956 — $350,000) that the state has made to “restore” what Mark Twain once described as an “architectural falsehood,” even the being restored, suggesting Louisiana could best “devote the restoration money to something genuine.”

The bid was received Aug. 9, but the commission rejected it as exceeding the $429,000 originally allocated. Together with the low bid, architect expenses and other contingencies, the cost will be some $300,000 more than the allocation made when the project was first ordered readvertised.

MEETING IS HELD

This was the action rescinded Thursday as the low bid by Milton Womack, Baton Rouge, was accepted.

Only four of the seven members were present for the meeting, and one of them voted against the rescinding action—Jimmy Fontenot, assistant state comptroller. Fontenot said he felt the state might save money by readvertising. The architect said Womack had agreed to extend the contract offer, but Fontenot replied “I suggest we ask for some more bids. We might save some money on it.”

“Things are going up,” replied State Treasurer A. P. Tugwell. “You might lose this bid right now. I’m for doing nothing or doing it right.” He declared he opposed “patchwork” restoration.

INTEREST AVAILABLE

Cecil Hill, asked how much interest was available now from idle fund investments, said the commission has some $500,000.

Sen. B. B. “Sixty” Rayburn, Bogalusa, complained that the project started off with a $200,000 estimate. “Is this supposed to be a really complete job, from one end to the other?” the architect replied it was.

Tugwell reminded the commission that the state originally planned $900,000 to restore both the Presbytere and Cabildo in New Orleans and ultimately had to spend more than twice that much. Furthermore, he said, the commission’s action was subject to a legislative poll.

COULD NOT VOTE

Fontenot told the commission he could not vote for the action unless the project was readvertised.

“Let’s put Mr. Fontenot down as being too conscientious,” Tugwell said. He repeated he was opposed to patchwork restoration of the old capitol.

Tugwell moved acceptance of the Womack bid, and Rayburn seconded it. William V. Redmann, executive counsel to Gov. John J. McKeithen, added his vote to theirs to make it three to one.

OTHER ACTION

The commission approved a number of change orders for small amounts on other projects, and accepted several others as being complete.

The Bond and Building Commission, with an identical membership, also met Thursday and approved a number of change orders, plus ordering advertisement of bids for a new water well at Louisiana Polytechnic Institute at Ruston.

The commission quibbled over whether to approve a $7,323.82 change order at Huey P. Long Charity Hospital, Pineville, to provide room for a computer, declaring it was not in the original plans. In addition, Rayburn insisted “I think when we start getting into cost-plus, we’re getting into trouble.” (The contractor on the present project offered to provide the space at cost, plus a 10 per cent profit).

Learning the U.S. Public Health Service had already approved the expense, the commission voted to accept the contract change.