

# Two Big Domes, and a whole lot more:

## A Capitol Comparison

Visitors to the Arkansas Capitol sometimes ask if the building is a replica of the national Capitol in Washington DC. In light of the similar layout and profile of the two buildings, this is a reasonable question, one with a long history. The short answer is “no”; comparing the buildings’ basic dimensions measurements reveals wide disparity in size and proportions. On the other hand, undeniable similarities exist: the two buildings share an architectural style and the mission of serving as the home and heart of their respective governments.



The US Capitol (hereinafter USC) is approximately 751 feet long at ground level. The Arkansas Capitol (ARC) is 440 feet long at the first floor, or 59% as large as the USC. The USC is 350 feet wide, at its widest point, while the ARC is 190 feet wide, or 54% of the USC.

In height, the ARC comes closest to the USC. The Arkansas structure is 230 feet tall, from ground level to the top of the gilded cupola’s finial. The USC’s dome, crowned with a statue, ends 288 feet above ground level.

Thus, the ARC is 80% as tall as the USC.

Comparisons of area are a little more complicated. The footprint of the USC is 175,170 square feet—about four acres. The footprint for the ARC, counting the basement (since much of it is above grade) works out to just 91,200 square feet, 52 % of the USC figure. Floor area claimed for the USC is approximately 16 \_ acres—a whopping 717,090 square feet. Recent figures indicate that the net floor area of the ARC may be as little as 242,160 square feet. Other estimates have produced figures as large as 278,000 or even 286,982 square feet. These may sound spacious, but at best they represent just 40% of the space available in the USC.

The ARC’s proportions differ significantly from those of the USC, so calling it a “scale replica” is a gross oversimplification. There exist, however, some clear similarities. The Arkansas Capitol as built is a textbook example of the Neoclassical style, which combines Doric, Ionic and Corinthian design elements. The USC was also built in this style, as were many other public buildings of the 19th and 20th centuries. The layout of our Capitol (and of many other state houses) echoes that of the federal Capitol but this is less imitation than the result of being designed to house parallel governmental institutions: legislative, executive and judiciary branches. Unlike the Arkansas Capitol the Washington structure has been considerably enlarged since its “completion” in 1863 and most of its original sandstone walls have been covered in white marble. The remaining exterior sandstone and iron dome are painted white; the Arkansas Capitol’s stone walls and dome retain their original natural finish.



Arkansas Capitol

For those determined to compare the overall sizes of the two capitols, the most direct way is as follows: Add the ratios of the ARC’s three cardinal measurements (length, width, height of dome) compared with those of the USC, then divide by three. The result will be the overall size of the Arkansas Capitol expressed as a percentage of that of the U.S. Capitol. If one accepts the USC’s claimed dimensions the calculation runs thus:  $59+54+80=193/3=64$  percent. Expressed as a fraction, this amounts to approximately 5/8ths of the size of the USC.