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FEDERAL COURTHOUSE TO BE REPAIRED OR REBUILT AT COST OF MORE THAN \$30 MILLION

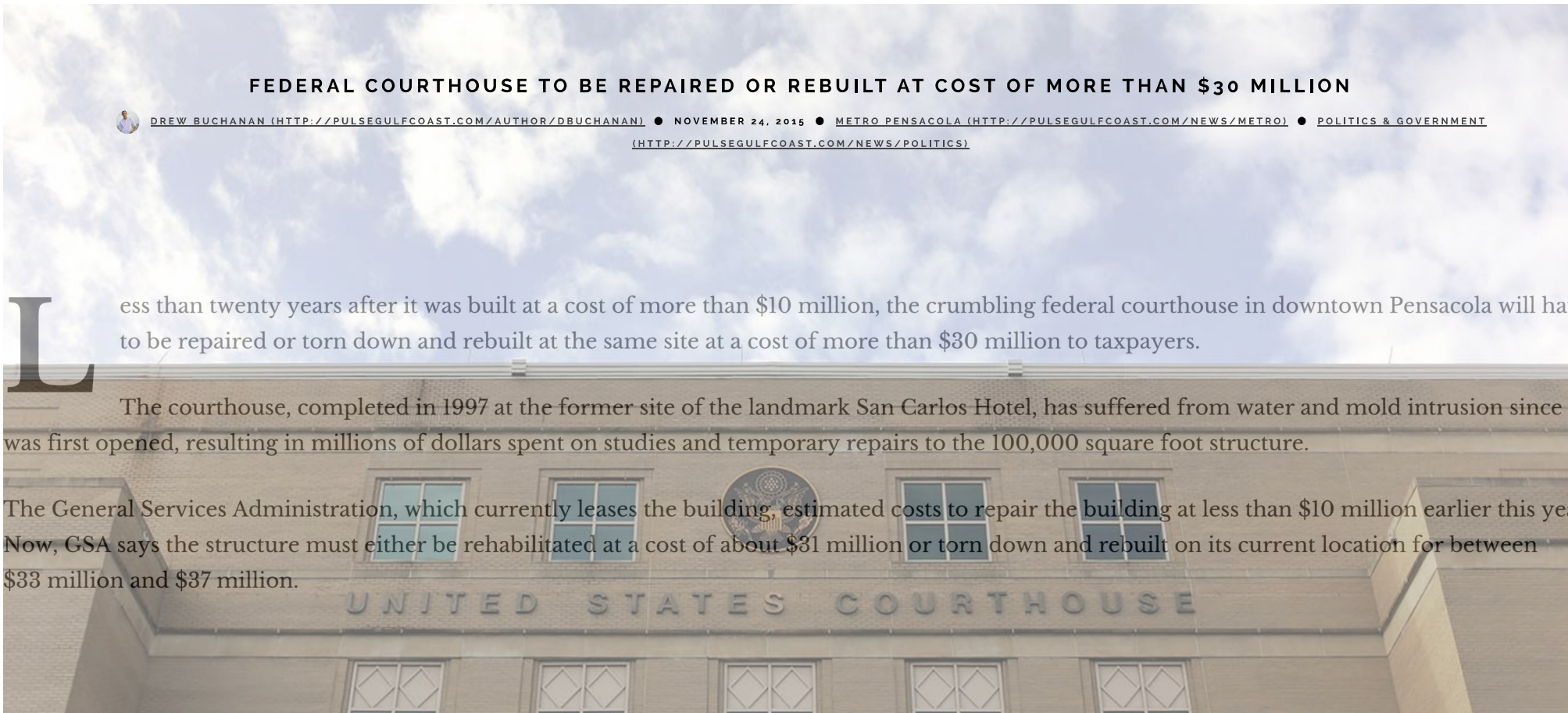
 [DREW BUCHANAN \(HTTP://PULSEGULFCOAST.COM/AUTHOR/DBUCHANAN\)](http://pulsegulfc coast.com/author/dbuchanan) • NOVEMBER 24, 2015 • [METRO PENSACOLA \(HTTP://PULSEGULFCOAST.COM/NEWS/METRO\)](http://pulsegulfc coast.com/news/metro) • [POLITICS & GOVERNMENT \(HTTP://PULSEGULFCOAST.COM/NEWS/POLITICS\)](http://pulsegulfc coast.com/news/politics)

Less than twenty years after it was built at a cost of more than \$10 million, the crumbling federal courthouse in downtown Pensacola will have to be repaired or torn down and rebuilt at the same site at a cost of more than \$30 million to taxpayers.

The courthouse, completed in 1997 at the former site of the landmark San Carlos Hotel, has suffered from water and mold intrusion since it was first opened, resulting in millions of dollars spent on studies and temporary repairs to the 100,000 square foot structure.

The General Services Administration, which currently leases the building, estimated costs to repair the building at less than \$10 million earlier this year. Now, GSA says the structure must either be rehabilitated at a cost of about \$31 million or torn down and rebuilt on its current location for between \$33 million and \$37 million.

UNITED STATES COURTHOUSE





[content/uploads/2015/11/FederalCourthouse-112415-005.jpg](#)

The U.S. Federal Courthouse in downtown Pensacola. (Drew Buchanan/The Pulse)

The failings of the structure date back to when it was first constructed by Philadelphia-based Keating Development under a “lease construct” agreement with the GSA. Keating Development still owns the building, which collects rent from the GSA paid by the federal court, adding up to more than \$5 million over 18 years, according to officials.

Earlier this year, more than 100 federal employees were forced to vacate the courthouse due to health concerns brought to the attention of federal officials by Chief Judge Casey Rodgers, whose chambers are in the building. Rodgers stated in a letter to GSA officials in March that more than half of all employees reported health effects suffered by the occupants, from nausea to chest pains and shortness of breath – all symptoms consistent with mold exposure.

The building’s disrepair has also forced elected officials to relocate staffs elsewhere. U.S. Senator and Republican Presidential candidate Marco Rubio said that he was forced to move his employees out of the courthouse after a pregnant woman began showing symptoms that were consistent of someone exposed to toxic mold.



Senator Bill Nelson (D-Florida)

Sen. Bill Nelson has voiced his frustrations over the continued issues plaguing the courthouse, stating the continued problems of the courthouse have forced its workforce into a “desperate” state of need for a new facility. “Since the courthouse opened, it has been fraught with problems related to shoddy construction.” Nelson said. The senior senator from Florida assured the public he is taking the steps to get money appropriated to rebuild or rehab the building.



*Chief District Judge
Casey M. Rodgers*



[content/uploads/2015/11/FederalCourthouse-112415-003.jpg](#)

The U.S. Federal Courthouse in downtown Pensacola. (Drew Buchanan/The Pulse)

In March 2015, Rodgers sent a letter to the GSA saying the courthouse had been infested with mold for 20 years without any permanent remediation. She also said more than half of the building's employees had reported health problems consistent with mold exposure.

The building was completed in 1997, but occupancy was delayed until spring of 1998 because of mold and water intrusion problems. Employees reported problems again in 1999, 2003, 2011, 2012 and 2014.

The lease of the building expires in July 2017 and ownership of the building is scheduled to revert back to the City of Pensacola, unless the GSA decides to take on ownership of the facility. Earlier this year, GSA stated they did not anticipate extending the term of the lease of the building. With new recommendations to repair or rebuild now being considered, that could change.



[content/uploads/2015/11/FederalCourthouse-112415-004.jpg](#)

The Winston E. Arnow Federal Building (Drew Buchanan/The Pulse)

Since the relocation of more than 100 employees from the courthouse, hundreds of thousands of dollars has been spent operating out of several other locations, including using two courtrooms at the Winston E. Arnow Federal Building across the street from the mold-ridden federal courthouse.

During his visit to Pensacola, Nelson said before a decision can be made to raze the current structure and rebuild or to repair, the GSA must come to a determination on the final costs of both options.

With a final decision on what to do with the federal courthouse not expected until next year at the earliest, the costs of temporary relocation are expected to rise into the millions between now and when the courthouse is repaired or a new facility is built.

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DREW BUCHANAN (HTTP://PULSEGULFCOAST.COM/AUTHOR/DBUCHANAN)

PUBLISHER AND SENIOR EDITOR

Drew Buchanan is a founding partner of The Pulse who currently serves as publisher and senior editor.

✉ [\(mailto:drew@pulsegulfcoast.com\)](mailto:drew@pulsegulfcoast.com)  [\(/www.twitter.com/drewbuchanan\)](http://www.twitter.com/drewbuchanan)  [\(https://instagram.com/drewbuchanan/\)](https://instagram.com/drewbuchanan/)

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DREW BUCHANAN

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