

White House Construction

Mark Smith:

Don't look now, but the West Wing of the White House is vanishing. Not in a magician's illusion or a Hollywood disaster flick, but thanks to a vast construction project that's almost entirely hidden it from public view.

Mark Smith:

It's an expanding zone of banging and digging, heavy equipment, earth moving, and concrete pouring, surrounded by a high plywood and chain-link fence. Officials describe this as an overdue upgrade of White House utilities, like water and sewer lines, electrical and other conduit, HVAC, and storm drains. And for those who work here, it has had a dramatic impact.

Mark Smith:

This is the main driveway that leads to the West Wing. Only now, it's a driveway that leads straight to the White House big dig, which means if you have an appointment to come see the president of the United States, you need to cut behind the camera platforms over here and use a special steel and concrete walkway that basically spans this huge construction site and disappears behind the fence line. And if you're a foreign leader, coming here by motorcade, basically you're told to use the back door.

Mark Smith:

With so much steel and concrete going in, inevitably it's fueled speculation that what's really being built here is some secret, new underground lair. But those running the work say that's not so. Yes, an underground tunnel is in the plan, but it's not a shelter, just for maintaining utility access. And it's got nothing to do with the existing bunker on the east side of the building.

Mark Smith:

However, the project is massive, costing 376 million dollars, and it will last through 2014, which means the world's most famous address will be a noisy construction site for years to come.

Mark Smith:

Mark Smith, The Associated Press, the White House.

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