

Testimony to Committee on Natural Resources

Subcommittee on Public Lands and Environmental Regulation Legislative Hearing on

HR 1126 (Bishop), the “Dwight D. Eisenhower Memorial Completion Act.”

Tuesday March 19, 2013 at 10 a.m. in 1334 Longworth House Office Building

Submitted by Susan Eisenhower

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee,

I wish to express our thanks to Chairman Bishop and the Committee for the opportunity to testify today. On behalf of the Eisenhower family, we are grateful to Chairman Bishop for the invitation and for introducing a bill to sustain the momentum on the building of an Eisenhower Memorial in Washington, D.C.

On hearing the news of this bill, Eisenhower Commission Chairman Rocco Siciliano said in an email reported in the press: “I am saddened by Congressman Bishops’ attempt to thwart the memorialization of one of America’s greatest generals and presidents, Dwight D. Eisenhower.”

My family and I respectfully, but emphatically, disagree:

Congressman Bishops’ legislation is designed to assure a memorial to Dwight Eisenhower, not to thwart it. From the moment the current design was adopted, some members of the Commission and the staff were determined to link the proposed Frank Gehry design to the very future of the memorial itself. This is unprecedented. This rigidity has damaged the effort to build a memorial. The approach has made adversaries out of stakeholders and alienated even the greatest supporters of this process.

Mr. Chairman, you and Congressman Issa have been the first to address the impasse that has unfortunately developed. We applaud you both for your efforts. We would also like to thank the co-sponsors of this bill. Continuation of the status quo, as you have pointed out, will doom the prospect of building a memorial. You are right that no consensus on the memorial design has emerged and that it is time to go back to the drawing board, with an open process for the redesign of the memorial.

Significant stakeholders believe that the Gehry design is, regrettably, unworkable. My family, as well as countless members of the public and the media, thinks the design is flawed in concept and overreaching in scale. The recent durability study notes the limited lifetime of the metal scrim, as well as the potential ice and snow hazard to the public. It also notes that the current design, to meet presidential memorial specifications, would require a duplicate set of scrim to be furnished. Yet despite all this, the Commission’s approach is to plow ahead with a

design that has virtually no support outside of a percentage of the architectural community—which has rallied more in defense of architect Frank Gehry than for the specific memorial design itself.

For more than ten years my family raised concerns and objections that were ignored, and we believe, never adequately communicated to all the Commission members. Any disagreement with the staff was “spun” as an attempt to scuttle the building of a national memorial. This could not be farther from the truth. The president’s only surviving son, our father, John S. D. Eisenhower, has been clear about his desire to see a memorial, but one which reflects his father’s values and enjoys national consensus. More than once this year he has weighed in, most recently this fall. I am providing a copy of the letter today, but the key points he writes are this:

- *Though “creative, the scope and scale of it [the Gehry design] is too extravagant and it attempts to do too much. On the one hand it presumes a great deal of prior knowledge of history on the part of the average viewer. On the other, it tries to tell multiple stories. In my opinion, that is best left to museums.”*
- *“Taxpayers and donors alike will be better served with an Eisenhower Square that is a green open space with a simple statue in the middle, and quotations from his most important sayings. This will make it possible to utilize most of the taxpayer expenditures to date without committing the federal government or private donors to pay for an elaborate and showy memorial that has already elicited significant public opposition.”*
- *“Though the members of the Eisenhower family are grateful to those who conceived of this memorial and have worked hard for its success, we have come to believe that the Eisenhower Memorial Commission has no intention of re-examining the concept, even though there would be ample historic precedent for it. It is apparently interested only in convincing us of the virtues of the present design, ignoring my objections as articulated by my daughters Anne and Susan.”*
- *“I am the first to admit that this memorial should be designed for the benefit of the people, not our family. However I am astonished by Rocco Siciliano's claim that his service in the White House gives him an unusual perspective on how my father would view this design. Besides being Ike's son, I served as an aide for a while just after the War, worked in the West Wing during the last years of the Eisenhower presidency, and later, at Gettysburg, assisted him in writing his presidential memoirs. And yet I would not make a claim like Mr. Siciliano's. You may or may not agree with our viewpoint. However, we as a family cannot support the Eisenhower Memorial as it is currently designed - in concept, scope or scale.”*

- *"We request that lawmakers withhold funding the project in its current form and stand back from approving the current design."*

The Eisenhower family DOES support the effort to revitalize this process. Among the first steps might be:

1. A defunding of the current design, including zeroing out money for current Commission staff salaries;
2. An open and transparent financial accounting of monies used to date, as well as those already committed;
3. A thorough review of the fundraising studies commissioned in the past, as well as the current efforts underway to assess financial needs; and
4. An explicit effort to find, perhaps, a neutral, non-partisan group to review the elements mentioned above, which can propose the needed organizational changes required for building a strong commission and a national consensus on this memorial.

Members of my family wish to thank, again, Chairman Rob Bishop and the Committee for holding this hearing, for their commitment to finding a way to resolve this impasse and for the opportunity to participate. We are deeply grateful to all of Congress for their effort to building a lasting memorial to Dwight D. Eisenhower.

John SD Eisenhower

October 18, 2012

Senator Daniel K. Inouye
Vice Chairman
Eisenhower Memorial Commission
722 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Inouye,

I am imposing on your time to offer a follow-up to a letter I wrote to Secretary of the Interior Salazar on April 10, in which I expressed my concern regarding the current design planned for the prospective Eisenhower Memorial. To my mind, though it is creative, the scope and scale of it is too extravagant and it attempts to do too much. On the one hand it presumes a great deal of prior knowledge of history on the part of the average viewer. On the other, it tries to tell multiple stories. In my opinion, that is best left to museums.

The Memorial design is so far off base that I urged a delay in the planning process for an extended period. An additional argument for a delay is our nation's economic situation. We have priorities more urgent than building such an expensive memorial right now. While no one wants to see taxpayer money come to naught, the memorial design is very controversial and unlikely to meet its financial goals. Taxpayers and donors alike will be better served with an Eisenhower Square that is a green open space with a simple statue in the middle, and quotations from his most important sayings. This will make it possible to utilize most of the taxpayer expenditures to date without committing the federal government or private donors to pay for an elaborate and showy memorial that has already elicited significant public opposition.

Though the members of the Eisenhower family are grateful to those who conceived of this memorial and have worked hard for its success, we have come to believe that the Eisenhower Memorial Commission has no intention of re-examining the concept, even

though there would be ample historic precedent for it. It is apparently interested only in convincing us of the virtues of the present design, ignoring my objections as articulated by my daughters Anne and Susan. A design alteration the Commission offered earlier this year made only peripheral changes.

I am the first to admit that this memorial should be designed for the benefit of the people, not our family. However I am astonished by Rocco Siciliano's claim that his service in the White House gives him an unusual perspective on how my father would view this design. Besides being Ike's son, I served as an aide for a while just after the War, worked in the West Wing during the last years of the Eisenhower presidency, and later, at Gettysburg, assisted him in writing his presidential memoirs. And yet I would not make a claim like Mr. Siciliano's.

You may or may not agree with our viewpoint. However, we as a family cannot support the Eisenhower Memorial as it is currently designed - in concept, scope or scale. We request that lawmakers withhold funding the project in its current form and stand back from approving the current design.

With high esteem, I am sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John Eisenhower". The signature is written in dark ink and is centered on the page.

John S.D. Eisenhower

cc. Eisenhower Memorial Commission
Members of Eisenhower family