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The memorial to Ike

A commission is right to proceed with its sound plans to honor Dwight D. Eisenhower.

SECOND-GUESSING the design of the nation's memorials is as American as the iconic figures they honor. When the Lincoln Memorial was being planned, no less an authority than Frank Lloyd Wright called it the "most ridiculous, most asinine miscarriages of building material that ever happened." Critics of the Jefferson Memorial wondered why this father of democracy was housed in a Roman temple. So controversial was Maya Lin's spare homage to those who died in Vietnam that the highest-ranking member of the executive branch to show up for its dedication was the deputy interior secretary.

So the controversy surrounding the planned Dwight D. Eisenhower Memorial shouldn't come as a surprise, nor should it be allowed to derail what promises to be an exciting addition to the Washington landscape.

Recent weeks have seen an escalation of passions surrounding architect Frank Gehry's design for the $112 million memorial planned for land just south of the Mall near the National Air and Space Museum.

The House subcommittee on national parks, forests and public lands held an unusual hearing in which there were calls to scrap the plans, underway since 1999, and start over. Leading the charge was Susan Eisenhower, a granddaughter of the 34th president, who invoked unfortunate images of Communist-era decorations and the fences of Nazi death camps to denounce Mr. Gehry's work. Others objecting, as The Post's Philip Kennicott reported, are architectural traditionalists offended by any departure from classical form.

To its credit, the Eisenhower Memorial Commission issued a statement last month giving its "total and unqualified support" for Mr. Gehry and his vision for the memorial that will, by order of Congress, commemorate Mr. Eisenhower not just as president but also as supreme allied commander during World War II. There is often tension between those building a monument that will serve posterity and those who knew the person to be honored. The bipartisan commission has undertaken a meticulous, public process that took pains to include the Eisenhower family. Mr. Gehry, America's most renowned architect, was selected following a procurement recommendation that the General Services Administration screened with a jury including grandson David Eisenhower, a member of the commission until his recent retirement. The commission and Mr. Gehry have signaled a willingness to continue to work with the family.

The architect's vision — which has undergone extensive review by a number of federal agencies and won the unanimous approval of the Commission of Fine Arts — would replace the mess of parking that occupies this space with a new urban park centered on a distinctive homage to Mr. Eisenhower. The commission should not be deterred in its efforts to break ground.