

ROLL CALL

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It's Time to Finish Ike's Memorial | Letter to the Editor

By Frank Fahrenkopf and retired Gen. P.X. Kelley

Feb. 24, 2014, 3:44 p.m.

In a recent opinion piece appearing in these pages, ("[It's Time to Bury Frank Gehry's Eisenhower Memorial](#)," Feb. 3) the Eisenhower Memorial project was attacked with the same old false criticisms, by the same old "nattering nabobs of negativism." The debate over the memorial to a great American has descended into a highly orchestrated partisan and ideological sideshow — embarrassing to our country and the legacy of a great American hero.

The United States, and the world, recognize that President Dwight D. Eisenhower was a great leader. To design his memorial, the Eisenhower Memorial Commission chose a designer regarded as one of the greatest architects of our time, Frank Gehry. Self-promoting interests now seek to halt the project and waste the \$40 million the taxpayers have already spent to bring this project to its current "shovel-ready" stage.

As current and former leaders of the Marine Corps, the American Battle Monuments Commission, the Republican National Committee and the Commission on Presidential Debates, we call on Congress to set aside this childish debate on the memorial project and approve its funding. To continue this charade by a handful of architectural second-guessers whose only goal seems to be to halt Eisenhower's memorialization is degrading to our institutions, our processes and Ike himself.

Opponents of the memorial would have you believe the stainless steel tapestries that form the memorial's backdrop will be plagued by all manner of disaster — trapped birds, dropped shards of ice, accumulation of rust and, ultimately, collapse. Recently in Roll Call, detractors have claimed the upkeep and repair of the tapestries will require "extraordinary expense."

Yet rigorous testing of tapestry materials and manufacturing processes, and the maintenance estimates made by the National Park Service, tell a very different story: stainless steel is safe, durable and easy to maintain. Imagine that! The material that holds up bridges, carries tens of millions of people aloft each year, and was approved for use in the U.S. Air Force and Korean War Memorials can withstand the elements in Washington, D.C. The true cost of upkeep? Not "extraordinary" but affordable —the National Park Service estimates it will be on par with the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial.

Lost in the invective of a vocal minority is the fact that Congress has funded the Eisenhower Memorial each year since its inception. That's right, the work of more than a dozen years has been funded at every milestone, reaching the point where the design is complete and federal approvals are under way. Why would anyone propose to turn back now?

Also lost is an important fact: The Eisenhower Memorial has bipartisan origins. Its enabling legislation was written by military veterans, the late Sens. [Daniel K. Inouye](#), D-Hawaii, and [Ted Stevens](#), R-Alaska. Since its inception, the commission's bipartisan panel of 12 commissioners — which included David Eisenhower for more than a decade — has conducted itself with transparency and a strong sense of purpose, ever-focused on the honor of memorializing Ike, voting unanimously in support of the memorial design.

Using invective and trumped up allegations to derail the Eisenhower Memorial is unbecoming to a great American hero, and an insult to its seven commissioners who are members of Congress: Sens. [Pat Roberts](#), R-Kan., [Jerry Moran](#), R-Kan., and [Jack Reed](#), D-R.I.; and Reps. [Mike Simpson](#), R-Idaho, [Mac Thornberry](#), R-Texas, [Sanford D. Bishop Jr.](#), D-Ga., and [Mike Thompson](#), D-Calif.

Let's get the Eisenhower Memorial done while there are still World War II veterans alive to see their great general and president honored.

— *Frank Fahrenkopf, co-chairman of the Commission on Presidential Debates and former chairman of the Republican National Committee, and retired Gen. P.X. Kelley, former chairman of the American Battle Monuments Commission and the 28th commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps. The two are co-chairmen of the Eisenhower Memorial Commission Advisory Committee.*

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