

## Almost there, Ike

By Editorial Board, August 10

IT IS a perplexing rite of passage that the United States' most cherished memorials must almost always endure public outcry in their infancy. Following the tradition that includes Maya Lin's Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial, the estimated \$142 million tribute to Dwight D. Eisenhower has been bombarded with rhetorical chaff and calls to begin the 15-year planning process all over again. Architects have lambasted the scheme of Frank Gehry, considered by some to be the nation's most distinguished architect, to build a four-acre park near Capitol Hill with modernist metal tapestries and statues of Mr. Eisenhower as a child and leader.

Congress has jumped on this bandwagon. It has refused to release construction funds since 2013 and severely cut operational expenses. Last month, Rep. Rob Bishop (R-Utah), who sits on the House Natural Resources Committee, proposed a bill to dismiss the Dwight D. Eisenhower Memorial Commission and its staff.

This bill was accompanied by a 56-page staff report that attacks the selection process and the commission's management of the project. But while the report, sensationally titled "A Five-Star Folly," raises worthwhile questions, the hype surrounding it is overblown and unhelpful to charting a course forward. The report unfairly criticizes the design's incompatibility with the so-called "seven design principles." In reality, these principles are subjectively interpreted, and Mr. Gehry has been open to input. Tapestries have been re-positioned, statues of Mr. Eisenhower added and columns tinkered with. Any presidential memorial, involving bureaucratic processes and aiming to whittle down a presidency into metal and stone, will inevitably go through numerous revisions.

More concerning is the report's documentation of cost increases and the commission's failure to raise private funds. In Mr. Gehry's contract, for example, some options have overshot the

original value by more than 20 percent. Yet commission officials told us that some of the perceived increases were due to construction-related funds being used earlier in the process than originally intended. They also disputed several numbers in the report, arguing that actual costs are millions lower than stated.

Regardless, there are two paths forward. One is to scrap the project and start over with an open public competition, which would cost around \$17 million, according to the Congressional Budget Office. The other is to push forward with the existing plan to finalize the memorial design and begin breaking ground.

We favor the latter. The report should serve as a wake-up call for the commission, but it is no smoking gun. Starting the process over would all but guarantee the opening of a new can of worms. More time and money would be spent. And the current design is nowhere near a “monstrosity,” as some have called it; it is a novel take on memorialization that will rank high on the list of memorable Washington landmarks.

Congressional support for the commission can stem the tide of opposition and accelerate the project’s completion. Mr. Eisenhower, a man of duty who had no appetite for public squabbling, would have wanted this job done.