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Building Ike's memorial

It's time to honor one of America's greatest military heroes



This undated handout image provided by Gehry Partners, LLP shows an aerial perspective of Eisenhower Square looking along Maryland Avenue, SW and Independence Avenue in Washington. A key arts panel has approved a revised design for a memorial to honor.

By P.X. Kelley - - Monday, October 27, 2014

In 2004, on a glorious spring day and with hundreds of thousands of World War II veterans and their families in attendance, I presented the World War II Memorial to President George W. Bush, who received it on behalf of the American people. As chairman of the American Battle Monuments Commission, it was my privilege to oversee the memorial's creation from design through to construction. You might say I'm a veteran of Washington's "memorial wars."

Building a national memorial is complicated, requiring focus, tenacity and patience. The process is lengthy, exacting and frustrating. Layers of approvals can take years, and include a diverse cast of characters. Design and other review panels must be satisfied. Government contracting regulations and the Commemorative Works Act must be followed. The Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Congress and representatives from the District of Columbia and federal government all have roles and responsibilities. From siting, to design, to materials and construction, numerous people and organizations are involved. In many ways, it's surprising our memorials are ever built.

Our nation's memorials give audiences from across the country and around the world a chance to learn about — and honor — America's heroes, statesmen and historic events. Dwight D. Eisenhower was a remarkable American hero. From his modest beginnings in America's heartland, to his ascension to the world stage, his leadership and vision had an enduring impact on both our nation and the world. As a military strategist he, quite literally, saved millions of

lives. His life and legacy are a true inspiration. Now, Eisenhower is about to be honored with a national presidential memorial appropriate to his status as both an American hero and an international leader.

The U.S. Commission of Fine Arts recently approved Frank Gehry's design for the Eisenhower National Memorial, as has the National Capital Planning Commission, which gave its long-awaited approval by an overwhelming vote of 10 to 1. That's a significant mandate and a strong sign that the memorial will proceed toward completion. Now it's time for Congress, along with some private partners, to mark the achievement of this progress through financial support. The history of Washington's memorial wars proves that the Eisenhower Memorial will ultimately be built. The necessary federal approvals are in place. Now it's up to Congress to provide the approvals and funding it always indicated would be forthcoming. The American people, and their congressional representatives, should never lose focus on the goal — a memorial commemorating one of the 20th century's greatest military heroes and political giants.

Gen. P.X. Kelley, former commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps, is co-chairman of the Eisenhower Memorial Commission Advisory Committee and a former chairman of American Battle Monuments Commission.