
DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER

MEMORIAL COMMISSION

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The Opinion Pages | EDITORIAL

Another Battle for Eisenhower

By THE EDITORIAL BOARD NOV. 3, 2014

Dwight David Eisenhower, the 34th president and military legend who organized the Normandy invasion, might have been bemused in his grinning Kansas way at the bureaucratic retreats and aesthetic flak it has taken to win approval of an official Eisenhower memorial on a 4-acre site overlooking the Capitol. A crucial vote of approval Oct. 16 from the United States Commission of Fine Arts signaled a go-ahead for an overdue tribute first approved by Congress 15 years ago.

One battle remains: Persuading Congress to provide financing for the estimated \$140 million cost. Some have questioned the spending and asked whether private donors can come up with their 20 percent share. Members of the Eisenhower Memorial Commission say that should be no problem now that the project has momentum.

Along the way, the innovative and modernistic design plan of Frank Gehry, the celebrated architect, predictably raised the hackles of neo-classicists as it encountered the usual rounds of controversy and delay that all memorial designs in Washington have to endure on the road to final approval. In April, things looked grim as the National Capital Planning Commission demanded some significant changes as the price of approval. In July, a Republican-led House committee waded in, pretentiously denouncing the project as a "five-star folly" and urging a fresh start. The commission persevered and Mr. Gehry adapted, creatively changing some aspects but never stalking from the field of battle in artistic umbrage.

The result, with its evocation of the fields of Kansas and the valor of West Point, remains worthy of President Eisenhower. Critics continue to object, including members of the Eisenhower family. But construction could begin late next year, pending final details on lighting, landscaping and other matters requested by the arts commission.

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As the next Congress is approached for financing, members should heed the words of approval from Representative Darrell Issa, a senior Republican and chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform, which has now endorsed the project. Mr. Issa sat down in August with Mr. Gehry to discuss the revisions. “We can’t go back to Square One,” Mr. Issa declared. “We have an obligation after 15 years to get this thing going.”

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