

Susan Eisenhower

Representing the Eisenhower Family

“The Proposed Dwight D. Eisenhower Memorial”

March 20, 2012

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Members:

I would like to thank you, on behalf of the Eisenhower family, for convening this hearing on the Dwight D. Eisenhower Memorial. Such hearings can play a vital role in the memorialization process, and we thank you for your leadership in addressing the public interest.

While some people may see little value in holding Congressional hearings on the current memorial design, all of us will benefit from a candid exchange of views. We, as a family, are committed to seeing that the building of a memorial to Dwight Eisenhower is done in an open, democratic and transparent way. This is what Ike would have wanted. He believed that public engagement and support is a crucial element in assuring any successful process and in meeting any collective objective.

Let me also say that my family is most grateful to the Eisenhower Memorial Commission, the General Services Administration and the National Park Service—as well as Mr. Frank Gehry, for the efforts he and they have made in bringing the memorial to this stage.

Mr. Chairman, On June 12, 1945, Dwight Eisenhower stood on the balcony of London’s Guildhall, where he was to receive the Freedom of the City of London. Europe lay in ruins. More than 15 million people in the Western part of continent had perished, not counting the 25 million Soviets who died on the Eastern Front. Eisenhower, who had victoriously commanded the largest military operation in the history of warfare, stood before millions of cheering Londoners. He spoke of the war and the collective effort to defeat Nazism. Without notes Eisenhower began his speech. “Humility,” he said, “must always be the portion of any man who receives acclaim earned in the blood of his followers and the sacrifices of his friends.”

These simple words, crafted without the help of a speech writer, give us a guide for capturing the essence of World War II’s Supreme Commander of Allied Expeditionary Forces, Europe and later our nation’s two-term president.

Eisenhower was born in the era of the horse and buggy. He ushered in the space age. Though his life straddled these two different periods in technological achievement and national life, he was a man who revered tradition and was grounded in the classics. Eisenhower had the capacity to inspire people of differing viewpoints to forge a common purpose, even in the most fractious, complex and perilous circumstances. It is these qualities, in the context of his achievements, which we hope will be memorialized.

The Eisenhower family has two major concerns about the development of the Eisenhower Memorial at this particular point. One is the proposed design and concept and the other is the

process that has brought us to this place. In both cases we see no alternative but to ask for strong remedies.

We propose that the Eisenhower Memorial be redesigned and we call on the Eisenhower Memorial Commission to undergo a top down review of its staff management practices, with the goal of streamlining its operations, reviewing its stakeholder policies, and reengaging in a meaningful way with the Eisenhower Legacy organizations, many of which were founded by Dwight Eisenhower himself.

A Monumental Imperative

We have been heartened by the robust public debate on how best to remember Dwight Eisenhower. Stories have appeared in newspapers from our country's largest cities to some of our smallest towns, and all across the internet. Since an active public debate began at the end of last year, comments from the public and the pundits have made wide-ranging points. Many of them have underscored what we have always known: great monuments in our country make simple statements that encapsulate the reason the memorial has been erected. George Washington is remembered as "the Father of our Country;" The Lincoln Memorial declares that he "He saved the Union;" the monument to Christopher Columbus in front of Union Station says: "[He] gave to mankind a new world."

One of the main flaws of the current proposal for the Eisenhower Memorial is that Eisenhower's contribution to this nation is not the central theme of the design. The narrative is muddled and never really gives us the "bottom line" phrase that articulates his contribution to the nation.

The current design calls for eighty-foot metal curtains to be suspended from columns of the same height, scattered on a four-acre site. These are approximately eight stories high, or the size of a typical office building. The metal curtains are designed to create a new kind of public square. Originally the metal scrims were to depict images of Eisenhower in his lifetime, but on the request of the approval authorities the Eisenhower Memorial Commission and Gehry and Associates were asked to find something "more artistic."

The current design now depicts a Kansas landscape. In the shadow of this three sided enclosure, a young life-size Eisenhower—his age is now currently under discussion—would be sculpted. Atop a stone ledge he is to sit "dreaming" of his future roles as Supreme Allied Commander and as a two-term president. Two well-known photographs would illustrate Eisenhower's accomplishments in bas relief.

Proponents of the young Eisenhower believe that children will be inspired by seeing themselves in the design-element's young Eisenhower. I wonder about this premise. Children are not impressed by children. They want to be Super Heroes. Perhaps that is why a visit to the Lincoln Memorial in one's youth remains a memory. The Lincoln Memorial is awe inspiring.

Despite the fact that recently released EMC documents show the bas reliefs as "monumental," the metal curtains dominate and define the space. They set Eisenhower's life in the context of his upbringing, not in the context of the times in which he lead this country against

fascism and communism—movements that posed existential threats to this country and our allies.

The Horatio Alger-like narrative that Eisenhower grew up to “make good” is a slight on the countless millions of people, during World War II and the Cold War, whose very existence were directly affected by Eisenhower’s decisions. Menachem Rosensaft, Vice President of the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors and Their Descendants, wrote me of this: “I grew up revering first General then President Eisenhower as the commander of the liberating armies that enabled my parents to live.”

Eisenhower’s professional assignments carried none of the romantic notion that is embodied in the current memorial concept and design. He was the person tapped to end the horrors of a Nazi-occupied Europe and later to lead the United States and her allies to halt communist aggression and avoid nuclear Armageddon. The man we celebrate is not a dreamy boy, but a real man who faced unthinkable choices, took personal responsibility and did his duty—with modesty and humanity.

The debate on this memorial has produced a groundswell of support for the idea of an Eisenhower Memorial while, at the same, expressing overwhelming opposition to the proposed concept and design. What has been seen in the newspapers and online is only piece of it. My family has been inundated with expressions of support for a reconceptualization of the memorial and a redesign of its elements.

So where do we go from here?

The task is to articulate Eisenhower’s leadership and courage to future generations, and symbolically express his contribution to this nation. Exciting ideas have been suggested by many.

Aviva Kempner, a film producer and Washingtonian whose mother was a Holocaust survivor, wrote me: “For us, Ike was the leader of the free world against tyranny. That is always how we will remember him and honor him...General Eisenhower was a revered name in our home and not a boy walking in the rye.”

A Washington resident, born and raised in Great Britain, also wrote me, wondering how Eisenhower’s background could be the theme of this memorial: “When I think of my own father flying scores of missions in WWII as a British bomber pilot, the sacrifice of countless Americans, the millions of Russians and Jews who died, etc...we should be memorializing what Eisenhower THE MAN did to overcome the horror of that time...”

“Liberator,” an African American colleague suggested, while reflecting not just on the war but on the desegregation of Washington DC and the armed forces – both early Eisenhower administration accomplishments. “Champion of Peace and Prosperity,” a New Yorker wrote. As president, Eisenhower managed to pay down America’s enormous WWII debt and balance the budget three times in eight years. He left his successor with a budget surplus, while modernizing America for the future.

The Challenge

Getting the conceptual narrative right is hard enough, but symbolism plays an equally vital non-verbal role. In this case, the design is on even shakier ground. We've heard from many people who object to the symbolism the metal curtains represent.

Billboards: My sister, Anne, and I enjoyed our one-on-one time with "Granddad," as we called Ike. Both of us recall that on completely separate occasions Granddad told us that he "hated billboards." This inevitably occurred just as one of us would be driving with him in the area around Gettysburg, Pennsylvania where our grandparents lived in retirement. Billboards advertised tourist venues but, in his view, they marred the beauty of the landscape and cheapened that hallowed ground.

Modern Tapestries: The design team at Gehry and Associates and the Eisenhower Memorial Commission has made a habit of referring to the metal curtains as "tapestries," referencing the tradition to place great people and events on woven material. This may be true of the Middle Ages, but noteworthy modern tapestries are those in the Communist world. Tapestries honoring Marx, Engels and Lenin used to hang in Red Square; Mao Zedong could be found in Tiananmen Square; and Ho Chi Minh's tapestry hung from public buildings in Hanoi—to name a few.

Iron Curtain: Other critics have noted that we will be putting up an "Iron Curtain to Ike." Given this symbolism, could the proposed cylindrical columns also be misconstrued as symbols of missile silos?

Fencing: Unfortunately, in the geo-political context, "fencing" has always had negative connotations. Not long after the debate on the Eisenhower Memorial began, a woman whose mother had survived Auschwitz approached me. She begged me to continue our efforts to get the memorial redesigned. Her mother, she told me, said the metal mesh scrims reminded her of the chain link fences in "the camps." Three other people also contacted me with concerns about the same symbolic message.

An Unnecessary Divide: The proposed metal curtains are to provide a screen that would obscure the Lyndon Baines Johnson Department of Education. This is a symbolic affront to one of Eisenhower's contemporaries and the Majority Leader of the Senate during the Eisenhower presidency.

My family and I do not believe for a moment that the design team envisioned that these metal scrims would evoke such reactions, nor do we think it was intentional. The potential for an unfortunate interpretation or association, however, has been established. Context *does* matter, and it took this vital public debate to see the pejorative symbolism that some Americans could see, from the outset, in the design.

Not the Memorial At All? Once the metal curtains became a controversy, the Eisenhower Memorial staff said in the national media that the so-called "tapestries" were "not the memorial"—only the backdrop. Since these metal scrims are symbolically inappropriate and since they also constitute the biggest expense--not to mention the greatest cost of future

maintenance-- we believe this is another reason why they should be eliminated as a design element.

Even if all the symbolic issues could be mitigated, these metal scrims are more suitable for a temporary exhibition than they are for a memorial that must last in perpetuity. Sustainability is a central goal in nearly every other avenue of modern life today—why shouldn't a memorial for the 21st century reflect this? The last few decades of limitless excess are over. Our 21st century challenge is to find simpler more elegant ways to express ourselves.

It is easy to imagine that eighty-foot metal mesh curtains would require constant maintenance. Any high wind would assure that everything from leaves to trash could easily get caught in the metal gaps. It is hard to imagine that the National Park Service would be equipped to handle the constant cleaning, especially at the higher reaches of the scrims.

Current plans for interactive technology are also unlikely to remain current. We continue to live in a time of technological revolution. Why make this story telling aspect of the memorial redundant before it has even been installed? There are other ways to tell the story of Eisenhower's life and times—a number of Eisenhower Legacy organizations, most specifically the Eisenhower Foundation that is associated with the Eisenhower Library and Museum in Abilene, Kansas, do an excellent job of this.

In sum, these factors have had a significant impact on the thinking of many people, including my family. A redesign should be sensitive to the context of Eisenhower's times, and avoid any elements that could be misconstrued as an Iron Curtain, concentration camp chain-link fences, or any other negative imagery from those turbulent and dangerous times. Any new design should also make sustainability one of its central goals.

Process is critical

The Eisenhower family has interacted with the Eisenhower Memorial Commission since its inception in 1999. My brother David Eisenhower was appointed by President Clinton to serve as the family representative on it. My other siblings, Anne and Mary, and I attended many meetings as interested parties, as well as conduits for our father John Eisenhower's views. He is Dwight Eisenhower's sole heir and executor of his will. I attach his letter for the record.

From the Commission's earliest days we have been concerned about its direction and we have spoken about it forthrightly. In the beginning, the memorial was planned to be both a physical memorial and a living memorial, which was to tell the Eisenhower story and to enhance the educational and leadership development mission of a number of Eisenhower Legacy organizations. The E-Memorial, which was created by the Commission, sidestepped the most important of the Eisenhower Legacy organizations, located in such states as Pennsylvania, New York and Kansas. The result has been a deterioration of the Commission staff's relationships with the Eisenhower Legacy organizations that are the largest and oldest in the community. While there have been recent attempts to heal the breach, much work remains to be done.

The Eisenhower family's relationship with the Commission staff is also more strained

today than ever before—in large measure because of the decisions the staff made in this current debate. Unfortunately, they have persisted in suggesting that the Eisenhower family is not united on the Eisenhower Memorial design. I have tried to set the record straight numerous times on my website: www.susaneisenhower.com, but they have continued to assert otherwise. The following, then, is hereby entered for the record. My brother David has submitted a statement to, once and for all, settle the question.

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I served on the Eisenhower Memorial Commission from its inception until December of 2011 in the de-facto role of representing the Eisenhower family on the Dwight D. Eisenhower Memorial Commission and as a regular Presidential appointee whose responsibility was to work with his fellow commissioners to ensure that the memorialization process moved forward.

During the selection process for an architect, a number of “jurors” including myself supported another architectural firm and did not vote to select Mr. Gehry as the architect. Once the Gehry firm was chosen, however, I supported efforts to assure that a memorial be built. During my tenure, the commissioners were always assured that the designs were evolving, and that there was plenty of time for consultation.

Recently, when Mr. Gehry was told that he could not use the Eisenhower images on the metal scrims, I generally supported the idea of a Kansas landscape. However, I did not know the details of how the “barefoot boy” theme was developing and I recognized the need to be in full consultation with the rest of my family. Since the July 2011 Commission meeting, when a final vote on the design was deferred, we as a family have discussed the design and the concept extensively. I am in full support of the family’s decision to share our concerns with the public, and I endorse the family’s efforts to gain a thorough review of the currently proposed design, including a redesign.

David Eisenhower

March 18, 2012

Berwyn Pa.

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When members of the Eisenhower family first saw the proposal to place Kansas on the metal curtains with a focus on Ike a young boy, we had varying responses. But as the spring of 2011 turned into the summer, small differences over how to proceed, turned into a unified sense of urgency to get the concept and design changed.

From the outset of this memorialization process, my family has repeatedly expressed its desire to see something simple and in keeping with Eisenhower’s character and values. In addition, we argued for a process that would accommodate a competition from range of architects specializing in different genres.

When it was clear that the architectural firm, Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, which is known for its modernistic approach, was chosen to develop the Pre-Design Architectural Program, we understood that the Commission was going to handle these matters in an entirely different way.

We intervened behind the scenes when we discovered that the review process was being “fast-tracked.” This was a surprise to us in light of the fact that the July 2011 Commission meeting ended without a formal vote on the design concept. Chairman Siciliano declared that the memorial concept and design were still evolving. (To our knowledge this was the last full Commission meeting that has been held.) Despite our concerns that the memorial design was being pushed through the review process, we were told only that they would keep us informed. As a result we issued a statement in November 2011, expressing our concerns about the “size, scale and scope” of the memorial proposal.

Today’s hearing, and possibly others in the future, gives us an opportunity think again about how best to memorialize Dwight Eisenhower. There should be some specific conditions, however. The Eisenhower family will adamantly oppose any ground- breaking for this memorial that occurs before it is absolutely clear that the financing for the project is in place.

Given the controversy surrounding the design and given the amount of private money that needs to be raised, we believe this current plan cannot be successfully funded. Unless a new concept and design are developed, this process could languish amid increasing contention. The public has spoken. It is time to go back to the drawing board.

As we move forward, why not find new ways to gain the wisdom of the American people and “buy in” from the countless people who have expressed an interest in finding a fitting memorial to Eisenhower?

Conclusion:

Eisenhower family is indebted to Congress for designating that an Eisenhower Memorial be built. The family is committed to playing its role in assuring that the process and the design reflect an open and transparent process that Ike believed was critical to the sound functioning of our democracy. If Eisenhower was great it was not just because of what he did, but also because of how he did it. Just as the memorial must reflect the values and principles of its subject, the process must emulate the man for whom the memorial is being built.

Going forward, there needs to be a much more open response to stakeholder input. Stakeholders are not just members of the Eisenhower family, military veterans, survivors of the Holocaust and their families, Cold War refugees or people connected to the Eisenhower Administration, Eisenhower Legacy organizations --or even residents of Ike’s home state—as important as we are. The most important stakeholders of all are the American people, especially rising generations who will be the future of this country.

It took well more than three designs to produce the FDR Memorial we have today. We should not be afraid of getting this right. In rethinking the memorial we now have an opportunity to find ways to inspire visitors who will come to this place. Eisenhower led the free

world when America became the world's greatest superpower. He brought the country through some of the most dangerous chapters of the 20th century.

“Eisenhower’s talents,” wrote Jonathan Tobin in *Commentary*, “were exactly what both our republic and the world needed at a moment when everything hung in the balance...”

The Eisenhower Memorial can and should be a reflection, not only of Eisenhower’s lifetime achievements, and the challenging and dangerous times in which he led us; it should also be anthem to our national purpose. As General Eisenhower said in his Guildhall address—the wartime victory was a common one. And he carried that humility to the White House. The peace and prosperity of the Eisenhower years were also America’s success.

The Eisenhower Memorial we leave will express not just of our esteem for his leadership, but it will reflect who we are as a people--and what part of this legacy we want to leave for future generations.