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Opening Statement by
The Honorable Rob Bishop
Chairman, Subcommittee on Public Lands and Environmental Regulation
At the Legislative Hearing on
H.R. 1126, the "Dwight D. Eisenhower Memorial Completion Act"
Tuesday, March 19, 2013 at 10:00 AM

I'd like to start off this hearing by thanking witnesses, members of the Eisenhower Family, and others who have a significant appreciation for one of our great American heroes, Dwight D. Eisenhower.

I want to make clear from the outset of this hearing that I wholeheartedly support the completion of a national memorial to President Eisenhower. I think it is appropriate that I emphasize "completion," because from discussions we have had with those close to the project, the Eisenhower family and Members of Congress, it is fair to conclude that funding the current design to completion will be daunting.

So how did we get to where we are today, considering legislation that calls for a new design competition to commence? We have a process that was set in motion in 1999 and followed with endless hours of work, consideration and deliberation. I am grateful for the work that has been put into the project thus far. I know for many it has been a labor of love for President Eisenhower, and a desire to see him appropriately memorialized. I congratulate the Eisenhower Memorial Commission, and staff for their professionalism and persistence. Thank you for your dedicated effort.

However, today we find ourselves in a position that was perhaps inevitable, but nevertheless hoped to avoid. Tomorrow will mark one year since our last oversight hearing on the Eisenhower Memorial. In that hearing we faced head-on the controversies regarding the design, in particular the metal scrims, and we asked questions about the selection of a designer. I left that hearing with the assurance that discussions would occur with the family, and the designer, and that perhaps modifications would be made that could bring *the public* closer to consensus on a design.

Unfortunately, one year later, I have now concluded that we could have saved a lot of time and money, if we just would have listened to Susan Eisenhower, who at the outset of the hearing called for a redesign of the memorial.

The taxpayers have over \$60 million invested in this project and I understand it will take many tens of millions more to construct and complete. Approvals have now been in limbo for over year and in that time we have received few assurances about the durability of the design. Durability is one of the most basic requirements of the Commemorative Works Act. And yet it is taking months of study and testing to see if this design can be melded and manipulated into some specification that can reasonably be called, "durable."

One of the goals of our hearing last year was to come away with a better understanding and appreciation for the selection of the designer. The commission, the GSA and the NPS testified in support of the process and assured us that it was fair. And why shouldn't it have been; this same process is replicated nationwide for a variety of federal building projects. But therein lies the problem. Someone along the way failed to recognize that this is not a federal court house or a GSA convention hall, this is a tribute to a man noted for his modesty, and this competition should have been open to **everyone**. In my reading of the record, this so-called open competition ultimately led to an evaluation of FOUR designs. FOUR designs. That's it. Now I understand why certain architectural trade associations are so concerned about this bill. Heaven forbid we upset a process that heavily favors large design firms. Can anyone really argue that four designs are adequate? Now the clouds clear and we see why this is being called a monument to a designer as opposed to our President Eisenhower.

The committee should understand that this is not a position I take lightly, there really is no political victory to be had. This is about doing right by IKE, the taxpayers and a grateful nation that wants to honor a man who led us through dangerous times. Congress entrusted this to a process, including multiple commissions and professionals with much more knowledge than any of us, with respect to architecture and design.

But I was struck by the words of one of our dear colleagues, the now retired Dale Kildee who served on this committee for several decades. At our hearing last year, he stated, "I know that Congress does not have a great deal of expertise in matters like this. But, recognizing that, we do have people who have knowledge of things. We have set up (a) process to make sure that what we do there on the monuments in the Mall are done correctly. And we have never relinquished our authority on that. We have always had problems. And we appreciate having a process, but at the same time, have not relinquished our authority in this area and our input on this."

I agree with Mr. Kildee, we may not be experts on design and architecture, but we have our responsibility to conduct oversight and legislate. In many respects we represent the average American who will visit this memorial.....and if this design doesn't make sense to us, then why on Earth would it make any sense to them?