

**Eisenhower Foundation Testimony**  
**Presented by Meredith Sleichter Executive Director**  
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Less than two months after General Dwight D. Eisenhower accepted the surrender of Nazi Germany, he returned here to his hometown of Abilene and delivered a speech.

In that speech, General Eisenhower – the man who orchestrated the largest naval invasion in history and liberated Europe from the iron grasp of Adolph Hitler – declared, “*The proudest thing I can claim is that I am from Abilene.*”

Think about that for a moment. General Eisenhower had literally just saved the world from unspeakable tyranny, but the thing he was most proud of was that he was able to call Abilene his home.

That’s because it was here in Kansas that Ike learned the values that shaped him into the great man he was. Eisenhower didn’t learn how to be a leader at West Point, or on the battlefields of Europe. **Rather, it was his strong Midwestern upbringing that taught him the values he would rely on to lead our nation and the world.**

And now I need your help to make sure those values are passed on to future generations. While the federal government, through the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), supports the overall structural, security and preservation needs of the archival and artifact collections at Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum, it is the Eisenhower Foundation that provides funding for exhibits, programs, and events through generous contributions from donors.

The Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum is a unique national cultural institution:

- The Eisenhower Presidential Library is one of only 14 Presidential Libraries in the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) system and Ike is the only 5-Star General to serve as President of the United States.
- In 2019, there were more than 147,000 visitors to the Eisenhower Presidential Library, Museum, and Boyhood Home **even though the Museum was closed for seven months due to renovations.**
- According to the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism, visitor spending in 2019 in Abilene and Dickinson County was \$22.93 million. No doubt the 147,000 visitors to the Eisenhower Museum that year contributed to the economic impact and demonstrated the importance of maintaining the educational programs and additional programs that bring thousands of Kansans to Abilene.

Between 2016 and 2019, the Eisenhower Foundation raised \$12 million dollars in private donations to conduct a comprehensive exhibit renovation. It was the largest fundraising campaign in the Eisenhower Foundation’s 75-year history, and the first comprehensive exhibit renovation in

more than 45 years. It re-opened to the public in August 2019 and received critical acclaim from the Wall Street Journal.

It wasn't easy to raise that private money. Why? The most common question donors asked during this campaign was, **“What is the State of Kansas doing to support the Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum?”** Sadly, the answer is *nothing*.

For comparison, the following is a listing of how the State of Missouri has supported the Truman Presidential Library & Museum:

- 1992/93: \$1MM cash/direct appropriation for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Campaign
- Late 90s: \$2MM cash/direct appropriation for major project (under Gov. Carnahan)
- 1999: \$3.5MM tax credits through Missouri Development Finance Board (MDFB) over 5 years (helped them raise \$7MM – didn't use all; less than \$150k short)
- 2006: \$400k tax credits through MDFB for Truman office renovation project (allowed them to raise \$800k)
- 2007: \$50k cash/direct appropriation from MO Dept. of Tourism for marketing/promotional expenses to celebrate 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of library
- 2018: \$4MM tax credits (50% tax credits through MDFB)
- 2019: \$3MM cash/direct appropriation from Treasurer's Office fund and library fund

The Eisenhower Foundation believes that support for this world-class institution is best achieved through a dual approach; it is about both *private* support and *public* support.

Senate Bill 71 gives the State of Kansas the opportunity to provide the public support so important to our work. The bill would provide crucial funding to support the exhibits, educational programs, and community events at the Eisenhower Presidential Library, Museum and Boyhood Home in Abilene, Kansas.

With interest in Dwight D. Eisenhower increasing as new records from his military career and presidency are declassified from our Library holdings, and as more and more K-12 students participate in our innovative IKEducation, sustained funding is essential. This will make it possible for the world, and a new generation, to learn more about Ike's unparalleled accomplishments as Supreme Allied Commander during World War II and the 34<sup>th</sup> President of the United States.

But more importantly, it is vital that we continue to educate current and future generations so our own Kansas children will continue to look to Ike as a role model. If our children can see what a “barefoot boy” from Kansas can accomplish when he works hard, it will inspire them to become leaders and heroes in their own way.

We cannot build on our momentum without an outpouring of your public support. This is your chance to leave a lasting impact that will inspire Kansas children for generations to come.