WASHINGTON (AP) — More than 30 years after the Korean War ended, a federal commission has suggested the government — instead of a private group — build a monument honoring the conflict's veterans in the nation's capital.

The American Battle Monuments Commission's recommendation to Congress has angered a private organization that was formed in 1981 and has already raised more than $400,000 for the project. Michael Panayotopoulos, who said he is a paid consultant to the private National Committee for the Korean War Memorial, said this week he considered the federal panel's plans "an affront, to say the least."

"Sort of interference"

"It's a sort of interference ... they know of our existence and our plans to build it by public subscription," he said.

Panayotopoulos noted that two bills are pending in Congress — one sponsored by Sen. Rudy Boschwitz, R-Minn., the other by Rep. Charles Rose, D-N.C., — that call for the federal government to donate land for a privately built Korean War memorial.

The Senate measure has 66 sponsors, the House version 164. But Col. Frederick Badger, the commission's engineer, said the panel's staff thinks it would be best if the government built the memorial to keep it from becoming mired in any conflicts between competing parties.

Want to avoid controversy

Commission member Larry Wright, a lawyer in Burlington, Vt., agreed.

"This is for people who gave their lives and it should not be the subject of controversy," said Wright. He added that the commission staff has done an excellent job building and maintaining..."