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WILSON: Honoring our debt to America's heroes

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By Arthur H. Wilson

Sunday, November 10, 2013



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An architectural rendering of the finished memorial more >

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"Fulfilling our promises to the men and women who served." This is the motto of the Disabled American Veterans. On this Veterans Day, we are one step closer to fulfilling a promise to honor and fully recognize the service and sacrifice of so many. For this is the last Veterans Day that our nation's capital will be without a permanent memorial to honor those men and women who served our country and suffered physical and emotional disabilities as a result of their service.

Next year at this time, we will have a place to gather for this purpose: The American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial, currently under construction, will have been dedicated and will be open for veterans and other visitors alike.

"In war, there are no unwounded soldiers." These words, penned by Argentinean author Jose Narosky, will be pointedly presented to the nation etched into a panel of glass at the memorial. I agree with Mr. Narosky — all veterans are, in a sense, wounded. While they return home as heroes, we have failed to honor them fully. That is, until now, thanks to this fitting monument of tribute.

The memorial will serve as a constant reminder of the cost of human conflict. At this sacred site, visitors will learn the important lessons of courage, sacrifice and honor by bearing witness to the experiences of so many brave patriots.

While all memorials create a variety of emotions for the many people who hold a stake in them, this memorial presents reflections and remembrances through an interaction of strength and vulnerability, of loss and renewal. The focal point of the memorial will be a star-shaped reflecting pool, its surface broken by a single ceremonial flame. A series of glass walls with embedded words and images will depict personal journeys of courage and extraordinary sacrifices, while a grove of trees will stand sentry beside the pool, signifying the persistence of hope. Experienced all together, these elements create a unique and respectful setting to reflect on the great sacrifices of America's disabled veterans.

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The journey to this memorial has been a long one. The legislation authorizing the [Disabled Veterans' Life Memorial Foundation Inc.](#), whose sole purpose is to raise private [funds](#) to establish the memorial, was introduced in Congress in 1998 and was co-sponsored in bipartisan fashion by John McCain and Max Cleland in the Senate and Sam Johnson and the now-deceased John P. Murtha in the House of Representatives. These actions realized a dream started years prior by philanthropist Lois Pope and the now-deceased Jesse Brown, former U.S. secretary of veterans affairs. On Oct. 24, 2000, the bill authorizing the establishment of the memorial was signed into law by President Clinton.

By [Veterans Day](#) 2014, the memorial will be open on a 2.4-acre site just south of the U.S. Botanic Garden and in full view of the U.S. Capitol. This year, the area is a construction site, and while [road](#) closures and detours may be a temporary inconvenience, the permanent memorial that will rise from the dust will serve as a lasting testament to those who gave so much in the defense of our country.

George Washington left us with a mandate to honor these warriors when, in 1783, he said: "I cannot omit to mention the obligations this Country is under, to that meritorious Class of veteran nothing could be a more melancholy and distressing sight than to behold those who have shed their blood or lost their limbs in the service of their Country it is therefore more than a common debt, it is a debt of honor."

Join with me today in making a [down payment](#) on that debt: Find a veteran and say, "Thank you." When you are next in our nation's capital after its opening, visit the American Veterans [Disabled for Life Memorial](#) to learn more of the sacrifices of these heroes. Your simple acts become fitting tributes in recognizing the debt of honor owed our disabled veterans, the debt Gen. Washington so well outlined more than 200

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Arthur H. Wilson is co-founder and president of [Disabled Veterans' Life Memorial Foundation Inc.](#)

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