

VFW Continues Its Strong Support of GWOT Memorial

It is important that the memorial be a place to honor the 1 percent of Americans who have served since the terror attacks of Sept. 11, 2001

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WASHINGTON – The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States is proud to continue its support of building a memorial in the nation’s capital dedicated to the Global War on Terror.

Michael “Rod” Rodriguez, an Army Special Forces retiree, was recently named President and CEO of the Global War on Terror Memorial Foundation. He visited the VFW Washington Office this week to provide an update on the foundation’s progress.

“Building a memorial is a 24-step process,” said Rodriguez, who’s a life member of the VFW Department of North Carolina. “We are on steps 9 through 12, which is site selection. Site selection involves the foundation itself coming together with a program and going before the various commissions that exist within this area.”

Rodriguez says the GWOT Memorial Foundation is trying to raise \$50 million for the project, which received the support of President Donald Trump in August 2017 when he signed the VFW-supported Global War on Terrorism Memorial Act into law. It clears the way for the GWOT Memorial Foundation to work with the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission to secure federal approval for acreage on the National Mall, as well as coordinate a national competition for the memorial’s design. It also exempts the GWOT Memorial from a provision in the Commemorative Works Act of 1986 that requires Congress to wait 10 years after the official end of a military conflict before considering a war memorial in the nation’s capital.

“The number one question I get asked all the time is ‘What’s it look like?’ Well, we’re not there yet. We’re not there yet. If you follow the steps and do what is dictated by the Commemorative Works Act [of 1986] and the federal government, you follow the steps and

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we're doing that," Rodriguez said. "What I learned to do within my 21 years of service is build teams."

The foundation has hired an architecture firm and is developing a program for the memorial. "This is what we're going to be trying to tell with this, this is the message, this is the story," Rodriguez said. "We want everyone involved."

He said it was important that the memorial be a place to honor the 1 percent of Americans who have served since the terror attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, but also a place for the rest of the country to pay respects and learn more about their sacrifices.

"One of the messaging points that I hope to bring forward with building this memorial," he said, "is to educate the 99 percent, because there are so many who don't even know a veteran anymore."

"It's very, very important for us to bring the 99 percent into the discussion so that going forward they can relate to it, they can understand it," he said.

Rodriguez said the memorial would be built based on four tenets: Honor, Empower, Heal and Unite. He also said that the memorial is "not a 9/11 memorial. This is the response to what 9/11 was."

"We're going to remind everybody what it felt like after the attacks on 9/11, how united we were as a nation. We were a country of Americans," he said. "I think this is an opportunity to say 'Thank You' in a very powerful and uplifting way – and together, saying 'Thank You' together as a nation."

Bob Wallace, executive director of VFW's Washington Office said the GWOT Memorial has the continued full support of the VFW.

"I explained to Rod that the VFW will lead the way and we'll support him in any way he needs, whether in the halls of Congress or before the Capitol Planning Commission or wherever," he said. "We will be there."

For more information, visit the [GWOT Memorial Foundation website](https://www.gwotmemorial.org/).