

Administration of Barack Obama, 2012

Remarks at Fort Stewart, Georgia

April 27, 2012

Thank you. Hello, Fort Stewart! It is good to be here at Fort Stewart. First of all, how about the First Lady, Michelle Obama? Hooah! She is a tough act to follow. For the gentlemen out there who are not yet married, let me just explain to you, your goal is to improve your gene pool by marrying somebody who is superior to you. Isn't that right, General? *[Laughter]*

Listen, and as you just heard, when it comes to all of you—when it comes to our military, our veterans, your families—Michelle Obama and Jill Biden have your back. They are working tirelessly to make sure that our military families are treated with the honor and respect and support that they deserve. And I could not be prouder of all the efforts that they've been making on their behalf.

It's a privilege to hang out with some of America's finest. The "Dog Face Soldiers" of the 3d Infantry Division! Rock of the Marne! We've got a lot of folks in the house. We've got the Raider Brigade! We've got the Spartan Brigade! We've got the Vanguard Brigade! We've got the Provider Brigade! And we've got the Falcon Brigade!

Let me thank Major General Abrams and his beautiful wife Connie, for welcoming us. Abe is doing an incredible job carrying on his family's incredible tradition of service to our country. So we are grateful for him. Give him a big round of applause. I want to thank Command Sergeant Major Edd Watson and his beautiful wife Sharon.

I want to thank someone who's made it her life's mission to stand up for the financial security of you and your families, somebody who knows a little bit about military families and military service. And actually, this is a homecoming for her because she spent over 3 years when they were posted down here—Holly Petraeus is in the house. I want you guys to give her a big round of applause.

But most importantly, I want to thank all of you. I want to thank you for your service. I want to thank you for your sacrifice. I want to thank you for your unshakeable commitment to our country. You have worn the uniform with honor. You've performed heroically in some of the most dangerous places on Earth. You have done everything that has been asked of you, and more. And you have earned a special place in our Nation's history.

Future generations will speak of your achievements. They'll speak of how the 3d Infantry Division's "thunder run" into Baghdad signaled the end of a dictatorship and how you brought Iraq back from the brink of civil war. They'll speak of you and your service in Afghanistan and in the fight against Al Qaida, which you have put on the path to defeat.

And to the members of the Special Operations Forces community, while the American people may never know the full extent of your service, they will surely speak of how you kept our country safe and strong and how you delivered justice to our enemies.

So history will remember what you did, and so will we. We will remember the profound sacrifices that you've made in these wars. Michelle and I just had a few moments at the Warriors Walk, paying tribute to 441 of your fallen comrades, men and women who gave their last full measure of devotion to keep our Nation safe. And we will remember them. We will honor them, always. And our thoughts and prayers also go out to the troops from Fort Stewart

who are serving so bravely right now as we speak in Afghanistan. And I know many of you will be deploying there too, so you know you're going to be in our thoughts and prayers.

Your generation—the 9/11 generation—has written one of the greatest chapters of military service that America has ever seen. But I know that for many of you, a new chapter is unfolding. The war in Iraq is over. The transition in Afghanistan is underway. Many of our troops are coming home, back to civilian life. And as you return, I know that you're looking for new jobs and new opportunities and new ways to serve this great country of ours.

And 3 years ago, I made your generation a promise: I said that when your tour comes to an end—when you see our flag, when you touch down on our soil—you'll be coming home to an America that will forever fight for you, just as you fought for us.

For me, as President, it's been a top priority. It's something I worked on as a Senator, when I served on the Veterans Affairs Committee. It's something I continue to this day. Since I took office, we've hired over 200,000 veterans to serve in the Federal Government.

We've made it easier for veterans to access all sorts of employment services. You just heard how Michelle and Jill have worked with businesses to secure tens of thousands of jobs for veterans and their families. And with support from Democrats and Republicans, we've put in place new tax credits for companies that hire veterans. We want every veteran who wants a job to get a job. That's the goal.

And those of you who want to pursue a higher education and earn new skills, you deserve that opportunity as well.

Like General Abrams's dad, my grandfather—the man who helped raise me—served in Patton's army. And when he came home, he went to school on the GI bill, because America decided that every returning veteran of World War II should be able to afford it. And we owe that same commitment to all of you.

So as President, I've made sure to champion the post-9/11 GI bill. And with that bill and the tuition assistance program, last year we supported more than 550,000 veterans and 325,000 servicemembers who are pursuing a higher education. Because a higher education is the clearest path to the middle class. Now that's progress, but we've got more to do. We can't be satisfied with what we've already done, we've got more to do. We've got to make sure you've got every tool you need to make an informed decision when it comes to picking a school. And that's why Michelle and I are here today.

Right now it's not that easy. I've heard the stories. Some of you guys can relate; you may have experienced it yourselves. You go online to try and find the best school for military members or your spouses or other family members. You end up on a web site that looks official. They ask you for your e-mail, they ask you for your phone number. They promise to link you up with a program that fits your goals. Almost immediately after you've typed in all that information, your phone starts ringing. Your inbox starts filling up. You've never been more popular in your life. All of these schools want you to enroll with them.

And it sounds good. Every school and every business should be out there competing for your skills and your talent and your leadership, everything that you've shown in uniform. But as some of your comrades have discovered, sometimes you're dealing with folks who aren't interested in helping you. They're not interested in helping you find the best program. They are interested in getting the money. They don't care about you; they care about the cash.

So they harass you into making a quick decision with all those calls and emails. And if they can't get you online, they show up on post. One of the worst examples of this is a college recruiter who had the nerve to visit a barracks at Camp Lejeune and enroll marines with brain injuries just for the money. These marines had injuries so severe some of them couldn't recall what courses the recruiter had signed them up for. That's appalling. That's disgraceful. It should never happen in America.

I'm not talking about all schools. Many of them—for-profit and nonprofit—provide quality education to our servicemembers and our veterans and their families. But there are some bad actors out there. They'll say you don't have to pay a dime for your degree, but once you register, they'll suddenly make you sign up for a high interest student loan. They'll say that if you transfer schools, you can transfer credits. But when you try to actually do that, you suddenly find out that you can't. They'll say they've got a job placement program when in fact, they don't. It's not right. They're trying to swindle and hoodwink you. And today, here at Fort Stewart, we're going to put an end to it. We're putting an end to it.

The Executive order I'm about to sign will make life a whole lot more secure for you and your families and our veterans and a whole lot tougher for those who try to prey on you. Here's what we're going to do.

First, we're going to require colleges that want to enroll members of our military or veterans or your families to provide clear information about their qualifications and available financial aid. You'll be able to get a simple fact sheet called "Know Before You Owe"—"Know Before You Owe." And it will lay out all the information that you need to make your own choices about how best to pay for college.

Second, we're going to require those schools to step up their support for our students. They need to provide a lot more counseling. If you've got to move because of a deployment or a reassignment, they've got to help you come up with a plan so that you can still get your degree.

Number three——

[At this point, the President sneezed.]

Excuse me. Number three—*[laughter]*.

Number three, we're going to bring an end to the aggressive and sometimes dishonest recruiting that takes place. We're going to up our oversight of improper recruitment practices. We're going to strengthen the rules about who can come on post and talk to servicemembers. And we're going to make it a lot easier for all of you to file complaints and for us to take action when somebody is not acting right.

This is about making sure you succeed, because when you succeed, our country succeeds. It's that simple. After all, at the end of World War II, so many Americans like my grandfather came home to new opportunities. Because of the original GI bill, by 1947, half of all Americans who enrolled in college were veterans. And you know what, they did pretty well.

They rose to become Presidents and Supreme Court Justices and Nobel Prize winners. They went on to become scientists and engineers and doctors and nurses. Eight million Americans were educated under the original GI bill. And together, they forged the backbone of what would become the largest middle class that the world had ever seen. They built this country. They turned us into that economic superpower.

And we can do it again. We've faced tough times: gone through the worst recession since the Great Depression, two wars. But you know what, we've faced tough times before. And all of you know something that America should never forget: Just as you rise or fall as one unit, we rise or fall as one Nation. Just as you have each other's backs, what has always made America great is that we have each other's backs. Each of us is only here because somebody looked out for us. Not just our parents, but our neighbors and our communities and our houses of worship and our VFW halls. Each of us is here because we had a country that was willing to invest in things like community colleges and universities and scientific research and medicine and caring for our veterans. Each of us is only here because somebody, somewhere, had our backs.

This country exists because generations of Americans worked together and looked out for one other. Out of many, we are one. Those are the values we've got to return to. If we do, there's nothing this country cannot achieve. There's no challenge that's too great for us. There's no destiny beyond our reach. As long as we're joined in common purpose and common resolve, better days will always lie ahead, and we will remind everybody why the United States of America is the greatest country on Earth.

And as I look out at this sea of incredible men and women, it gives me confidence that our best days are still ahead.

God bless you. God bless our Armed Services. God bless the Third Division. God bless the United States of America. Thank you very much.

And now I'm going to sign this Executive order.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:45 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Jill T. Biden, wife of Vice President Joe Biden; Maj. Gen. Robert B. "Abe" Abrams, USA, commander, and CSM Edd Watson, USA, division command sergeant major, 3d Infantry Division; and Holly Petraeus, wife of Gen. David H. Petraeus, USA (Ret.), Director, Central Intelligence Agency. He also referred to Executive Order 13607, which establishes principles of excellence for educational institutions serving servicemembers, veterans, spouses, and other family members. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the First Lady.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Fort Stewart, GA.

Locations: Fort Stewart, GA.

Names: Abrams, Connie; Abrams, Robert B. "Abe"; Biden, Jill T.; Obama, Michelle; Petraeus, Holly; Watson, Edd; Watson, Sharon.

Subjects: Afghanistan : Afghan military and security forces; Afghanistan : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Armed Forces, U.S. : Military families; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Casualties; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Service and dedication; Education : Postsecondary education :: Affordability; Georgia : Fort Stewart; Georgia : President's visit; Government organization and employees : Veterans, Federal employment opportunities; Iraq : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Terrorism : Al Qaida terrorist group; Veterans : Hiring incentives; Veterans Affairs, Department of : Education and job training assistance.

DCPD Number: DCPD201200311.