

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2023

Remarks on Signing an Executive Order on Advancing Economic Security for Military and Veteran Spouses, Military Caregivers, and Survivors in Fort Liberty, North Carolina

June 9, 2023

The President. Hello, Fort Liberty. It's great to be back at "the center of the universe"—especially with all you crazy guys that jump out of planes. *[Laughter]*

Tiffany, thanks so much for that introduction and for your family's service to our country.

General Donahue and Command Sergeant Major Holland; general officers; the Governor of the great State of North Carolina, who's here with us; the Congressman from the district, who's here with us: It's an honor to be here with you this afternoon.

I'm not going to take a lot of your time.

You know, people like to joke that when the President calls 9–1–1, the phone rings at Fort Liberty. *[Laughter]* Well, that's not too far from the truth. When you answer, you answer freedom's call every time. You—it's you who take on so many of the nationals—the Nation's toughest missions.

You deploy quickly and quietly. You risk your safety and protect the safety of Americans all across the world and all around the world. I've been in over 80 countries seeing how you work, and you're incredible. We literally have the single finest fighting force in the history of the world. That is not hyperbole. That's a fact. *[Applause]* That is a fact.

And as the English poet John Milton once wrote, "They also serve who only stand and wait." In the years—my—our son was in Iraq for a year—before that, in Kosovo. I get up in the morning, see my wife, who teaches school—she'd start earlier than I would—and she'd be standing there at the sink, drinking her coffee, mouthing a prayer. Every one of you spouses knows what is—happens—what possibly can happen when your son, daughter, husband, wife are deployed.

Jill and I never forget that military spouses, caregivers, and survivors serve and sacrifice as well. We never forget that you've also answered the Nation's call. And together, Jill and I and my entire administration, has never stopped working to do right by your service. You know, we're with you at the—here at Fort Liberty—"All the way"—Fort Liberty.

And I tell you what, as a nation, we have many obligations, but we have only one truly sacred obligations. And I used to get criticized years ago, as a young Senator, when I'd say this, but not anymore: We—the most sacred obligation America has is to prepare those we send into harm's way and care for them and their families when they come home or deploy.

Today we're taking an important step to fill—towards fulfilling that obligation. This new Executive order establishes the most comprehensive set of administrative actions in our Nation's history to support the economic security of military families, veterans' spouses, caregivers, and survivors, actions that boil down into three main goals: more flexibility, more support, and more resources.

I'll start with the flexibility piece. This Executive order encourages all Federal agencies to do more to retain military spouses through flexible policies. Policies like granting leave when their partner has to PCS, improving remote work opportunities for military spouses, including when they're stationed overseas.

And it's just common sense to keep families together. It keeps a talented workforce together. And look, it enables our Government to carry out its global mission.

Second, the Executive order means more support for military-connected families. Changing duty stations is already hard enough. You shouldn't have to navigate a complicated tax regulations or work requirements, but—all by yourself just to do that. If you're certified in one State and you're military, you should be certified in every other State when you move to that State.

The first time this Executive order will enable spouses to seek advice on overseas employment issues through military legal assistance offices.

It also—you also need support to navigate challenges unique to military families. Challenges like juggling childcare and work while your partner is deployed or when you're caring for an injured loved one.

Too often—too often—the people you work with, they just don't know. Not they don't care; they don't know. They don't know what you're going through. They don't know how it works. They don't understand everything you go through. That can be tough, and it can be even isolating.

That's why this Executive order establishes new training for Federal human resources and hiring personnel to ensure that all our military and veteran spouses, caregivers, and survivors feel seen and supported.

And finally, this Executive order means more resources, especially when it comes to improving military families' access to quality, defensible [dependable; White House correction], and affordable—affordable—childcare.

Today we're accelerating the implementation of the Dependent Care Flexibility Spending Account, which will give military families the option to receive a pretax benefit for daycare, preschool, and summer camps, and much more.

This order also focuses on providing resources—resources—for military spouses who are entrepreneurs, like some of the folks up here on this stage that will be here in a moment. That includes exploring new funding options like grants and loans to help military spouses start and sustain their businesses, and developing new resources that are going to make it easier for entrepreneurs to relocate their businesses if they have to PCS.

Folks, let me close with this: Next month, we'll celebrate 50 years of the All-Volunteer Force. At the time, there was some debate about whether or not we could draw in talent—the talent we needed, about whether Americans would answer the call to serve.

But 50 years on, we see so clearly all of you who raised your hand—all of you who volunteered—are the reason that our military today is the greatest fighting force in the history of the world, bar none. That's the reason.

And the reason—the reason we've been able to sustain that force year after year, decade after decade is because military spouses, caregivers, and survivors have answered the call as well. You have your loved ones' backs just like they have the country's back.

So the only way—the only way—to keep this force strong for the next 50 years, and 50 after that and the 50 after that, is if we keep our promises—if we uphold the sacred obligation we bear to our military members, our veterans, our spouses, caregivers, and survivors.

So today I'm here as Commander in Chief to sign this Executive order because it matters. It matters to our military recruitment and retention. It matters to our troops' readiness and resilience. And it matters to our Nation's safety and security.

Supporting our military and veterans' families is not just a moral imperative, it's a national security imperative. And I'm not joking. It is. And that should unite all of us, public and private sectors.

And together, we're going to keep doing everything we can to make sure if you receive the flexibility, support, and resources that you deserve, things are going to get better. That's my promise to you.

And to all military and veteran spouses, caregivers, and survivors, may God bless you all, and may God protect our troops.

Now I'm going to go over and sign this Executive order. And thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you for your service.

[At this point, the President approached the signing desk.]

Who else?

[A baby cried.]

You've got it, kid. *[Laughter]*

The First Lady. Wow. That's a little baby.

The President. Come on up here.

Participant. Twelve days.

The First Lady. Twelve days?

Womack Army Medical Center secretary Tiffany Zoeller. Twelve days.

The President. Come on up.

The First Lady. Does anybody want to stand over here?

The President. Everybody here?

The First Lady. Yes. I think everybody is here.

The President. All right.

"Advancing Economic Security for Military and Veteran Spouses, Military Caregivers, and Survivors."

[The President signed the Executive order.]

It's now the law.

[The First Lady presented the signing pen to Ms. Zoeller.]

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 4 p.m. in the Hercules Fitness Center. In his remarks, he referred to Lt. Gen. Christopher T. Donahue, USA, commanding general, XVIII Airborne Corps and Fort Liberty; CSM Thomas J. Holland, USA, senior enlisted adviser, XVIII Airborne Corps; Gov. Roy A. Cooper II; and Rep. Donald G. Davis. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the First Lady and Ms. Zoeller.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Military and veteran spouses, military caregivers, and survivors, efforts to advance economic security, signing the Executive order in Fort Liberty, NC.

Locations: Fort Liberty, NC.

Names: Biden, Jill T.; Cooper, Roy A., II; Davis, Donald G.; Donohue, Christopher T.; Holland, Thomas J.; Zoeller, Tiffany.

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