

Remarks Announcing the Joining Forces Initiative To Support Military Families

April 12, 2011

Thank you very much. Well, as you can see, the Vice President and I are the warmup acts here today. [*Laughter*] Our role is to introduce our better halves. Actually, Michelle and Jill are, like, our better three-quarters or four-fifths. They're basically just all around better. [*Laughter*]

So thank you, Jill, for your introduction and sharing your personal experiences and stories and being able to describe how much this means to you personally; to the Vice President, the entire family, which, like so many others, has known both the pride, but also the worries and the fears when a loved one in uniform is serving in harm's way.

We are joined today by Members of Congress, by members of my Cabinet, Joint Chiefs, by leaders across the administration and just about every sector of American society. But most of all, we're joined by our servicemembers and their families, representing the finest military that the world has ever known.

And while the campaign that brings us all together is truly unique, it does reflect a spirit that's familiar to all of us, the spirit that has defined us as a people and as a nation for more than two centuries: Freedom is not free, simple words that we know are true. For 234 years, our freedom has been paid by the service and sacrifice of those who've stepped forward, raised their hand, and said, "Send me." They put on a uniform. They swear an oath to protect and defend. And they carry titles that have commanded the respect of generations: soldiers, airmen, marine, sailor, coastguardsman. Our Nation endures because these men and women are willing to defend it with their very lives. And as a nation, it is our solemn duty and our moral obligation to serve these patriots as well as they serve us.

But we are here today because these Americans in uniform have never served alone: not at Lexington, not at Concord, not in Iraq, not in Afghanistan. Behind every American in uniform stands a wife, a husband, a mom, a dad, a

son or a daughter, a sister or brother. These families—these remarkable families—are the force behind the Force. They too are the reason we've got the finest military in the world.

Whenever I'm with our troops overseas, when I ask them, "What can we do for you?" there's one thing they request more than anything else: "Take care of my family." Take care of my family. Because when our troops are worried about their families back home, it's harder for them to focus on the mission overseas. The strength and the readiness of America's military depends on the strength and readiness of our military families. This is a matter of national security. It's not just the right thing to do, it also makes this country stronger.

And that's why over the past 2 years, we've made major investments to take care of our military families. Secretary Gates has been one of the leaders in this process: new housing and childcare for families, new schools for military kids, better health care for veterans, new educational opportunities for hundreds of thousands of veterans and their family members under the post-9/11 GI bill.

And that's why, as part of a landmark Presidential Study Directive, for the first time ever, the well-being of our military families is now a national priority—not just a Defense Department priority, not just a VA priority, it is a Federal Government priority.

Today my administration is working to implement nearly 50 specific commitments to improve the lives of military families, everything from protecting families from financial scams to improving education for military kids and spouses to stepping up our fight to end homelessness among veterans. And as Commander in Chief, I'm not going to be satisfied until we meet these commitments. Across this administration, we're going to keep doing everything in our power to give our military families the support and the respect that they deserve.

But as we've said all along, this can't be the work of Government alone. Something else has

been true throughout our history: Our military and our military families can't be the only ones bearing the burden of our security. The United States of America is strongest—and as Americans, we are at our best—when we remember our obligations to each other; when we remember that the price of freedom cannot simply be paid by a select few; when we embrace our responsibilities to each other, especially those who serve and sacrifice in our name.

And that's why the extraordinary work that Michelle and Jill have been engaged in these past 2 years is so important. I remember how it began. It was during our campaign. Michelle was meeting with women all across the country, listening to their struggles, hearing their stories. And inevitably there were complaints about husbands and—[laughter]—not doing enough around the house and—[laughter]—being confused when you've got to brush the daughter's hair and get that ponytail right. [Laughter] So they were sharing notes. But in all these conversations, there was one group that just kept on capturing Michelle's heart, and that was military spouses.

And she decided right then and there, if I was given an opportunity to serve as President and she was given the opportunity to serve as First Lady, she would be their voice. And that's exactly what she and Jill have done.

Remarks at George Washington University April 13, 2011

Thank you very much. Please have a seat. Please have a seat, everyone.

It is wonderful to be back at GW. I want you to know that one of the reasons that I worked so hard with Democrats and Republicans to keep the Government open was so that I could show up here today. I wanted to make sure that all of you had one more excuse to skip class. [Laughter] You're welcome.

I want to give a special thanks to Steven Knapp, the president of GW. I just saw him; where is he? There he is right there.

I want to—we've got a lot of distinguished guests here, a couple of people I want to ac-

You all see the events around the country—on the bases, in the communities, at the hospitals with our wounded warriors—where Michelle and Jill celebrate our military families—celebrate your families—and what we can do to support you better. But what you don't see is what happens when the cameras are off, how Michelle and Jill come back and they are inspired by what they saw and they use their platform to advocate on your behalf in every single agency.

So I want every military family to know that Michelle hears you, not just as a First Lady, not just as a fellow American, but as a wife and a daughter and a mom. She's standing up for you and your families not just today, in public events like this one, but every day. And the voice that she promised to be, that's what she's been out there doing, making sure that you're getting the support and appreciation that you and your families deserve.

And so it is my honor to introduce to you my extraordinary wife, America's extraordinary First Lady, Michelle Obama.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:34 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Vice President Joe Biden, his wife Jill T. Biden, and the First Lady.

knowledge. First of all, my outstanding Vice President, Joe Biden, is here. Our Secretary of the Treasury, Tim Geithner, is in the house. Jack Lew, the Director of the Office of Management and Budget; Gene Sperling, Chair of the National Economic Council, is here. Members of our bipartisan fiscal commission are here, including the two outstanding Chairs; Erskine Bowles and Alan Simpson are here.

And we have a number of Members of Congress here today. I'm grateful for all of you taking the time to attend.

What we've been debating here in Washington over the last few weeks will affect the lives