

Remarks on Programs To Aid Veterans Seeking Employment November 7, 2011

Thank you very much, everybody. Please be seated. This week, we commemorate Veterans Day. We honor the service and the sacrifice of all who have worn the uniform of the United States of America with honor and distinction. And above all, we commit ourselves to serving them, as well as they have served us. That's why we're here today.

Today's 9/11 generation of veterans has already earned a special place in our history. Over a difficult decade, they've performed heroically in some of the world's most dangerous places. They've done everything that we've asked of them. And I'm honored to have some of these extraordinary Americans here at the White House with us this morning.

I'm also proud to be joined by some of America's leading veterans service organizations—the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans, and Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America—as well as Members of Congress who have historically been extraordinarily supportive of our veterans. And we're here today to try to take some steps to better serve today's veterans in a rough economy.

Over the past decade, nearly 3 million servicemembers have transitioned back to civilian life, joining the millions who have served through the decades. And as we end the war in Iraq and we wind down the war in Afghanistan, over a million more will join them over the next 5 years. Just think about the skills these veterans have acquired, often at a very young age. Think about the leadership that they've learned, the cutting-edge technologies that they've mastered, their ability to adapt to changing and unpredictable circumstances you just can't get from a classroom. Think about how many have led others to life-and-death missions by the time they're 25 or 26 years old.

This is exactly the kind of leadership and responsibility that every American business should be competing to attract. This is the kind of talent we need to compete for the jobs and industries of the future. These are the kinds of

Americans that every company should want to hire.

And yet, while our economy has added more than 350,000 private sector jobs just over the past 3 months, more than 850,000 veterans remain unemployed. Too many can't find a job worthy of their tremendous talents. Too many military spouses have a hard time finding work after moving from base to base. And even though the overall unemployment rate ticked down last month, unemployment among veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan continued to rise. That's not right. It doesn't make sense—not for our veterans, not for our families, not for America—and we're determined to change that.

I've told the story before of a soldier in the 82d Airborne who served as a combat medic in Afghanistan, and he saved lives over there. He earned a Bronze Star for his actions. But when he returned home, he couldn't even get a job as a first-responder. He had to take classes through the post-9/11 GI bill—classes that he probably could have taught—just so he could qualify for the same duties at home that he was doing every single day at war.

You know what? If you can save a life on the battlefield, then you can save a life in an ambulance. If you can oversee a convoy or millions of dollars of assets in Iraq, you can help a business back home manage their supply chain or balance their books. If you can juggle the demands of raising a family while a loved one is at war, you can juggle the demands of almost any job in America.

We ask our men and women in uniform to leave their families and their jobs and risk their lives to fight for our country, and the last thing they should have to do is fight for a job when they come home. And that's why we're here today, to do everything in our power to see to it that America's veterans have the opportunities that they deserve and that they have earned.

Now, I've already directed the Federal Government to lead by example and to hire more veterans. And it has hired more than 120,000

so far. A couple of months ago, I also challenged private companies to hire or train 100,000 post-9/11 veterans or their spouses by the end of 2013. And already companies have hired more than 12,000 and committed to train or hire 25,000 more over the next 2 years.

And I want to thank the extraordinary work of my wife, the First Lady, as well as Dr. Jill Biden for leading this Joining Forces effort to support our military families and our veterans.

Nearly 2 months ago, I sent Congress the “American Jobs Act.” It was the only jobs plan independent economists said would boost our economy and put Americans back to work right now, and it was full of the kinds of ideas that have historically been supported by both parties. It was paid for.

And it included two proposals that would have made a big difference for our veterans: the returning heroes tax credit, which would give businesses a tax break for each unemployed veteran that they hire, and the wounded warriors tax credit, which would give businesses a even larger tax break for hiring an unemployed veteran with a disability related to their service in uniform. And these veteran service organizations are here today because they fully support these ideas.

Unfortunately, we have not yet seen progress in Congress. Senate Republicans have so far chosen to block these bills and these proposals. Since then, they’ve also blocked a jobs bill that would keep teachers in the classroom and first-responders on the street and blocked a jobs bill last week that would have put hundreds of thousands of construction workers back to work rebuilding America. Despite the fact that more than 70 percent of Americans supported the ideas in this bill, not one has yet stepped up on the other side of the aisle to say this is the right thing to do. So they’ve had three chances to do the right thing. Three times, they’ve said no.

I believe it’s time they said yes to taking action that would boost the economy overall, because the overall economy has an impact on veterans. It’s a lot easier for veterans to find jobs if the economy is growing rapidly and unemployment is dropping. And I think it’s im-

portant for all of us to remember that we’re all in this together. It’s time we started acting like it. Bold action from Congress ultimately is the only way we’re going to put hundreds of thousands of Americans back to work right now and rebuild an economy where everyone who works hard has a chance to get ahead. So I’m going to keep pushing these Senators to vote on commonsense, paid-for ways to create jobs that members of both parties have supported before.

But what I’ve also said is that I’m going to do everything in my power, as the head of the executive branch, to act on behalf of the American people, with or without Congress. We can’t simply wait for Congress to do its job. As Commander in Chief, I won’t wait, nor will I let politics get in the way of making sure that veterans share in the opportunity that they defend. If Congress won’t act, I will.

And that’s why, 2 weeks ago, I announced a new initiative to help trained veterans get jobs in the medical community. And today we’re announcing three new initiatives to help America’s returning heroes get jobs that meet their talents.

First, we’re delivering on the expanded job search services that I promised our post-9/11 veterans 3 months ago. Starting today, post-9/11 veterans looking for work can download what we’re calling the veterans Gold Card, which gives you up to 6 months of personalized job search services at career centers across the country.

Second, we’re launching an easy-to-use online tool called My Next Move for Veterans that allows veterans to enter information about their experience and skills in the field and match it with civilian careers that put that experience to use.

Third, we’re connecting unemployed veterans to job openings. We’ve partnered with leading job search companies to create a new online service called Veterans Job Bank, where employers can tag jobs postings for veterans using a simple approach designed by major search engines. And already, more than 500,000 job openings have been tagged, thanks to a company called Simply Hired, and

companies like Monster and LinkedIn are helping more employers participate.

So all these three initiatives are up and running right now. Just visit whitehouse.gov/vets to find each one. And I'm asking these veterans service organizations to spread the word.

Connecting our veterans to the jobs they deserve isn't just the right thing to do for our veterans, it's the right thing to do for America. But there's still more that we can do to encourage businesses to hire veterans. And this week, Congress will have another chance to do the right thing. They'll get to vote on those tax breaks that I proposed back in September for businesses to hire veterans. Members of Congress will get to say whether or not they think it's a good idea to give companies an incentive—an additional incentive—to hire the men and women who have risked their lives for our country.

And when I first proposed this idea—some of you remember this was a joint session of Congress—people stood and applauded on both sides of the aisle when I announced this bill. That was one of the few times both sides stood up. [Laughter] So when these ideas come up for a vote this week, when the TV cameras aren't necessarily on each of them, I expect both sides of the aisle to stand up for our veterans and vote in the affirmative.

There's no good reason to oppose this bill. Not one. Our veterans did their jobs. It's time

for Congress to do theirs. It's time for them to put country before party, put our veterans back to work, and pass this element of the jobs package that benefits our veterans and gives businesses an incentive to hire veterans.

Standing up for our veterans is not a Democratic responsibility or a Republican responsibility, it is a American responsibility. It's an obligation of every citizen who enjoys the freedom that these heroes defend. And it is time for us to meet those obligations right now.

As Commander in Chief, I want all our veterans to know that we are forever grateful for your service and for your sacrifice. And just as you fought for us, we're going to keep fighting for you, for more jobs, for more security, for the opportunity to keep your families strong and to keep America competitive in the 21st century. In other words, we're going to keep on fighting, just as you did, to show the world why the United States of America is still the greatest nation on Earth.

Thank you very much, everybody. God bless you. God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:04 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Spc. Nicholas Colgin, USA, 82d Airborne Division; and Jill T. Biden, wife of Vice President Joe Biden.

Statement on the Presidential Election in Liberia November 7, 2011

The Liberian people will go to the polls tomorrow to elect the next President of Liberia. This historic vote is an opportunity for Liberians to strengthen the country's democracy and to deepen its peace, prosperity, and national unity. We encourage all voters of all political preferences to exercise their universal right to participate in the democratic process. All Liberians should have the ability to exercise this right without fear of violence or intimidation.

Liberia has taken important steps to consolidate its democracy since the end of its civil war. Those gains must not be set back by indi-

viduals who seek to disrupt the political process. The international community will hold accountable those who choose to obstruct the democratic process. We encourage all security forces in Liberia to exercise maximum restraint and to allow peaceful protest. And we commend all that international election observers, the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UN-MIL), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the Liberian people are doing to ensure a free, fair, and peaceful runoff election.

The United States is deeply committed to its historic relationship with Liberia and its peo-