

Remarks on the Fifth Anniversary of the Joining Forces Initiative at Joint Base Andrews, Maryland

May 5, 2016

The President. Hello, everybody! Give it up for Joe Biden! Oh, it is good to see all of you here today. Thank you so much. Everybody, please have a seat.

I want to recognize all of our outstanding military leaders who are here. And I want to acknowledge our Secretary of the Air Force, Deborah Lee James; Chief Master Sergeant Mitchell Brush from the National Guard; Major General Darryl Burke; Wing Commander Bradley Hoagland. And I want to thank the USO for the outstanding work that they have done for so many years and it means so much to not only those who serve in uniform, but also their families. So please give it up for the USO. We are very proud of them.

And let's hear it for the funny people who are here tonight who are going to be—I think—telling a few jokes, I hope, including our host, the Bob Hope of this USO show, Jon Stewart. The one and only. I do want to mention, though, any jokes told about me, you should not laugh. [Laughter] I'm just kidding. This is actually my second comedy show in the past week. [Laughter] The good news is, there are no tuxedos. [Laughter] And most importantly, I get to spend some time with you, the men and women who make up the greatest fighting force the world's ever seen.

I know we already did the roll call, but I just want to see if you guys can do it a little bit better this time. [Laughter] And by the way, I'm going to start with Army, because Jon made fun of you. Army! [Applause] There you go. We've got Navy here. [Applause] Air Force is in the house! [Applause] This is an Air Force base. [Laughter] I mean, I'm just saying. You've got a little home field advantage. [Laughter] Marines! [Applause] And Coast Guard. [Applause] All right. Good job, Coast Guard. [Laughter] Military spouses and kids, let's hear you! [Applause]

It is—this is a nice way for me to not just say thank you for your service, but to give a particular thanks to Joint Base Andrews, home of the

89th Airlift Wing. Because Joe and I spend a little bit of time on this base. [Laughter] You guys are the ones who take care of our planes. You keep us on time, most of the time. [Laughter] And you're always the first ones to welcome us home. So you mean so much to us. And I'm so glad we're able to do something here so that you guys know we don't take you for granted. And Michelle and I, Joe and Jill, when we come in and out of this base, we know how many people stand behind the planes and the helicopters and all the incredible work that's being done just moving us around every single day. So thank you very much. We really mean it. Thank you.

Thanks for your service here. Thanks for your service around the world. Now, because I'm standing between you and a party, I am going to be the Commander in Brief. [Laughter]

One of my greatest honors is to serve you and your families. And that means using our military power wisely. It means sending you into harm's way when it's absolutely necessary. It means making sure that you—our troops, our veterans, your families—are getting the care and the benefits that you've earned. It means cutting the disability claims backlog. It means helping you and your families, whether it's starting a business or pursuing your education under the post-9/11 GI bill.

And the good news is, we've made a lot of progress over these past 8 years. But the work of doing right by you and your families is never done. And it is not just a job for Government. And that's why we're here today.

Back on the campaign in 2008, Michelle sat down with some military spouses, and she was deeply moved by the stories of your service, and your strength, and your resilience. She heard stories of families enduring multiple deployments. This was obviously at a time when we still had 180,000 troops deployed between Iraq and Afghanistan. Spouses and veterans were coming home and struggling to find jobs. Children constantly moving from school to

school. And these are stories you live out every day, but they're ones that the rest of the country wasn't always hearing. So Michelle pledged that if she became First Lady, she'd help share those stories far and wide and challenge Americans to stand with you.

And 5 years ago, she teamed up with another formidable force, Jill Biden, to start *Joining Forces*. As a Blue Star Mom, as a teacher whose dad served in World War II, Jill was already fired up about reaching out to military kids. And together, they wanted to channel what they knew was America's good will towards our military into something concrete and something real. Not just a parade on Veterans Day or Memorial Day, not just honors at a ballgame, but what was happening day to day to make people's lives better. And so Michelle and Jill wanted to help folks answer a question that a lot of people were asking, which is, how can we do more? How can we help more?

So they started by focusing on the most basic ingredient of stability and security: a job. In the aftermath of the economic crisis, the unemployment rate overall had reached 10 percent. But for some of our veterans it was even worse. As many as one in four of our youngest vets were looking for jobs. And too many of our military spouses were struggling to find work because their families were constantly relocated.

So Michelle and Jill reached out to hundreds of America's biggest brands and employers—companies like Walmart and Disney and Amazon—telling them the same thing I tell CEOs every time, which is, if you want a job done right, hire a vet, hire a military spouse. They know how to handle stress. They know how to do the job. They know how to perform under pressure. They have proven themselves.

And the good news is, over the past 5 years, America's businesses have begun to answer the call. All told, the unemployment rate for veterans has been cut in half, and through *Joining Forces*, companies have hired or trained more than 1.2 million veterans and military spouses.

But Michelle and Jill didn't stop there. They worked with States to change professional licensing laws so that our vets can get credit for your military training and spouses can get

hired when you move across State lines. They're working to rally almost 900 mayors and local leaders to get our homeless veterans into housing and to get the support that they need. They help teachers and schools support military students from kindergarten through college. They supported our caregivers and our wounded warriors. And they've worked to destigmatize mental health challenges.

They've worked with Hollywood to share your stories with the American people in movies and television. And they've shined a special light on our women servicemembers and our veterans. And they've mobilized communities all across the country to honor and support our military families.

All of this just in 5 years. And here's the thing. This event is not the endpoint, it's not the finish line. This is just a marker on the race. It's a mile marker. Because every year, around 200,000 American heroes are transitioning back into civilian life. And whether it's wartime or peacetime, many of our troops still serve far from home, and families like yours sacrifice. So Michelle and Jill have pledged to keep charging forward on this issue, not just for the next 9 months, but long after we leave office.

And that's why tonight, on this fifth anniversary, I want to renew Michelle and Jill's call from the day they launched this effort. I challenge every American to keep asking that simple question: "How can I give back to these troops and families who have given me so much?" Everybody should have that in their minds. Because thanks to *Joining Forces*, we have answers in terms of how you can help.

If you're a business owner, hire more veterans and military spouses. And if you don't know how to do it, let us know. We'll tell you. If you're a teacher, reach out to the military students in your class. And if you need ideas for how to provide more support, *Joining Forces* will let you know. If you're a mayor or a co-worker or a neighbor, go to joiningforces.gov to find out how you can make a difference for military families in your communities. That's how we can concretely show that we have your

backs: that it's not just lip service, but we're actually doing something concrete.

That's what today is about. I could not be prouder of everything the American people have done and will continue to do through Joining Forces. More importantly, I think I speak for Joe Biden to say I could not be prouder of two people who are as smart and charismatic and committed and dedicated. What they've been able to accomplish with almost no budget, but just through sheer force of will and personality and commitment to you is something that leaves me in awe. I am so proud of them.

Give it up for two champions for our troops and our veterans and our military families: Michelle Obama and Jill Biden.

Jill T. Biden, wife of Vice President Joe Biden. Hi. Hello. Thank you to the Commander in Chief, President Obama, for that wonderful introduction. Thank you. And of course, I want to say thank you to my husband, Joe, the Vice President—

The President. He's all right. [Laughter]

Mrs. Biden. —for always supporting and encouraging me to do as much as we can to show our military families how much we appreciate them.

[At this point, Mrs. Biden made additional remarks, followed by remarks from the First Lady.]

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 6:18 p.m. in Hangar 8 of the District of Columbia Air National Guard. In his remarks, he referred to CMSgt Mitchell O. Brush, USAF, senior enlisted adviser, National Guard Bureau; Maj. Gen. Darryl W. Burke, USAF, commander, Air Force District of Washington and 320th Air Expeditionary Wing; Col. Bradley T. Hoagland, USAF, commander, 11th Wing and Joint Base Andrews; and comedian and television personality Jon Stewart. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Vice President Biden, Mrs. Biden, and the First Lady.

Remarks on the National Economy and an Exchange With Reporters May 6, 2016

The President. All right. Good afternoon, everybody. Seven years ago, in April of 2009, our economy lost nearly 700,000 jobs, and the unemployment rate hit 9 percent on its way to 10 percent.

Seven years later, in April 2016, our economy added 160,000 new jobs. That makes April the 74th consecutive month of private sector job growth in America. Over that record streak of job growth, our businesses have created 14.6 million new jobs in all. Wages have been rising at an annual rate of more than 3 percent this year.

So the unemployment rate [economy]^o has been growing, unemployment has been falling, and wages have been rising. But the global economy, as many people here are aware, is not growing as fast as it should be. You're still seeing lagging growth in places like Europe,

Japan, and now China. Here in the United States, there are folks out there who are still hurting. And so we've got to do everything we can to strengthen the good trends and to guard against some dangerous trends in the global economy. And if the Republican Congress joined us to take some steps that are pretty common sense, then we could put some additional wind at the backs of working Americans.

To create new jobs, they should invest in our infrastructure: our roads, our bridges, our schools, our water mains. Some of you joined me when I went to Flint this week. It was a great example of the kind of work that is out there to be done. And we could be putting people all across this country back to work, with huge multiplier effects across the economy, if we started investing in the infrastructure that will make us more productive.

^o White House correction.