

DoD launches spouse partnership

By ELAINE SANCHEZ
Fort Jackson Leader

In an effort to address military spouses' employment challenges, the Defense Department last week launched a program to expand career opportunities for military spouses worldwide, and to recognize the skills and talents they bring to the employment table.

Flanked by military spouses and corporate leaders, top government and military officials unveiled the Military Spouse Employment Partnership during a ceremony at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce here. The partnership encompasses more than 70 employers who have committed to opening their doors to spouse employment.

In remarks at the event, Jill Biden, wife of Vice President Joe Biden, lauded military spouses for their service and sacrifice as they juggle households, children, volunteer work and jobs — many times in the midst of deployments.

Because of their ability to thrive despite multiple challenges and demands, she noted, military spouses possess the qualities highly sought after by employers, such as dedication, flexibility, a strong work ethic and "endless energy."

"If you're looking for hard-working, highly skilled and educated, dedicated employees," Biden said, "our military spouses are precisely the employees you need."

"Every day our military spouses are giving back to our country," she added. "While their loved ones are called to serve, they serve right alongside them. Now we must serve them as well as they serve us."

Deborah Mullen, who was accompanied to the event by her husband, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Navy Adm. Mike Mullen, acknowledged the difficulties military spouses face in finding jobs.

Many spouses, she noted, are turned away for jobs, not due to their qualifications or training, but due to the frequent moves their service member spouse is required to make.

"More than one spouse has told me, 'All I wanted was to get in the door to be able to be judged on my merits, my qualifications and my strengths,'" she said. But in many cases, she noted, they are unable to even score an interview.

"They aren't asking of rules to be broken or regulations to be cast aside," she said. "They know the economy is tough out there ... This isn't about entitlement for them; this is about opportunity."

"Military spouses just want the same shot as everyone else," she added.

Only 1 percent of the nation serves, comprising about 2.2 million service members, Mullen said, and about half of them are married to someone seeking a job. And most of those job seekers are women, she noted, "educated resilient, serious women who possess strong values and even stronger work ethic."



DoD photo by NAVY PETTY OFFICER 1ST CLASS CHAD J. MCNEELEY
Jill Biden greets audience members at the Military Spouse Employment Partnership kick-off at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in Washington, D.C., June 29. The partnership promotes meaningful, long-term employment opportunities between America's employers and military spouses.

IN THE KNOW

Fort Jackson spouses who want employment or education assistance can contact Fort Jackson Employment Readiness at 751-4862.

The partnership launched today signifies a positive step toward employing these highly skilled spouses, Biden said. "We're making it a little easier for them to find work, and perhaps a little less frightening for new employers to take that gamble and find the talent so resident in our ranks," she said.

But the work is just beginning, Biden noted. Today, the Defense Department launches the partnership, she said, and "tomorrow, we must make that partnership work."

Clifford L. Stanley, undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness, lauded the partnership, noting that programs like this didn't exist when he joined the Marine Corps in the 1960s. He recalled a time when he and his wife had to watch their spending, unsure of whether or not she'd have a job at the next duty station.

Today, there's an abundance of programs aimed at supporting military families, and their welfare is taken into consideration at every level of command, Stanley said. The partnership is a significant commitment toward that military family care and, he added, "a big deal" for spouses and employers.

The event also marked the inclusion of 15 new employers who signed onto the partnership today.

Leaders from each company stepped forward to sign a statement of support, signifying a pledge to:

- Increase employment opportunities for military spouses, while maintaining employment for relocating spouses;
- Provide career promotion opportunities for military spouses who are excelling at their jobs;
- Ensure pay equity for military spouses commensurate with their level of training, work experience, accomplishments and credentials; and
- Spread the word about spousal support throughout the military and corporate America.

Partners also are pledging to post job opportunities on the Military Spouse Employment Partnership Web portal located on [OurMilitary.mil](http://www.ourmilitary.mil) at <http://www.ourmilitary.mil>.

Leader deadlines

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