

## Joining Forces Event, Pentagon, Arlington, VA, February 15, 2012



Dr. Jill Biden addresses invited guests at the Joining Forces Event

On February 15, 2012, Erin Voirol, **Gateway Manager and Job Placement Coordinator** attended a Joining Forces event at the Pentagon in Arlington, VA. The event was presented by Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Martin Dempsey, First Lady Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden, wife of Vice President Joe Biden.

The event was started by the Secretary of Defense who discussed the difficulties his wife experienced while he was serving in the Military and they were required to move from state to state. Each time they relocated, she needed to have her licensing changed in order to meet new state requirements, delaying her ability to gain employment while she was forced to wait for her new licensing. He then introduced General Dempsey.

General Dempsey discussed his and his wife's desire to work to make life better for Military spouses through the Joining Forces program and his work with the First Lady and Dr. Biden to improve Military Spouse employment options. He discussed the importance of a spouse's ability to be able to feel the financial and emotional reward of being an asset to their families and how that transfers to the Soldier out on the battlefield. General Dempsey introduced Dr. Biden.

Dr. Biden discussed how she and Mrs. Obama traveled to military bases across America and throughout the world over the last three years, hearing stories from many military family members and spouses, with one of the top issues being dealing with the professional licensing requirements that affect how military spouses can move forward in their careers. She discussed her position as an Educator with a license and how she understands the difficulties someone who would need to be moving on a very regular basis would encounter. She then introduced Ann Wells, R.N. and Military spouse.

Mrs. Wells related how over 10 PCS moves in a 30 year period she had, at many times, not pursued having her license transferred to a new state because of the difficulties she faced. She discussed the major lag time this could create in being able to find work at a new duty station and begin helping to provide for her family. She discussed how important her career was to her and the desire to make people understand that her career was just as important to her as her husband's Military career was to him. Mrs. Wells introduced the First Lady.

Mrs. Obama discussed her desire to serve Military Families; she reiterated Dr. Biden's statement that license transfers was a hit button item for Military spouses. She discussed how she and Dr. Biden worked with the Treasury Department and the DOD to build a guideline for the 26 states that do not already have a program in place to help spouses, using the other 24 states that have already begun programs that do make it easier for spouses to transfer; some states even allow a spouse to obtain a temporary license to be able to begin working right away. Mrs. Obama also discussed the need for employers to recognize the strengths of the Military spouse workforce and the dedication and commitment they bring to future employers.



Erin Voirol, Gateway Manager, and Mrs. Bonnie Amos, Wife of General Amos, Marine Corps Commandant