

President Barack Obama, sharing his thoughts on the sacrifice made by U.S. soldiers, said "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."

The launching of this comprehensive national government-led initiative - dubbed *Joining Forces* - has garnered the support of nearly 50 governmental agencies and private entities ranging from the U.S. Department of Defense to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. It is an expansion of the President's "Strengthening our Military Families" directive initiated earlier this year, which called for the federal government to become heavily involved in fulfilling the needs of veterans and military families.

"This is a challenge to every segment of American society not to simply say thank you but to mobilize, take action and make a real commitment to supporting our military families," said Mrs. Obama of the program aimed at mobilizing all sectors of society to give military service members and their families the opportunities and support they have earned. Among the features of the *Joining Forces* program is the expansion of employment and career development opportunities for veterans and military spouses, access to wellness programs, resources for military spouses and families, and support for the academic achievement of military children by helping schools become more responsive to the unique needs of military children and families.

Giving a glimpse into how *Joining Forces* came to fruition, Mrs. Obama said, "Joining Forces is inspired by the amazing military spouses and children who we've met all across the country..., families who've told us that even with the huge outpouring of support for our troops over the last decade, the truth is that as a country, we don't always see their families, our heroes on the home front. These families have appealed to us, like a military mom who wrote to me and said, 'Please don't let Americans forget or ignore what we live with.' Please don't let them forget." Retired four-star Gen. Stanley McChrystal will help lead the three member advisory board that will be the nucleus for *Joining Forces* alongside the Center for a New American Security. Businesses and non-profits are also lending a helping hand to this cause to ensure it delivers on its promise. AOL, Cisco, Indeed.com, Microsoft, Hewlett-Packard, and USO are a few companies and non-profits that are supporting the effort.

According to a 2008 report from the Department of Defense, there are 22.7% enlisted African Americans serving in the Army, 21.3% serving in the Navy, 11.6% serving in the Marines and 17.8% serving in the Air Force.

Some of the attendees at the event were the U.S. Department of the Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner, U.S. Department of Defense Secretary Robert Gates, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs Secretary Ric Shinseki.

Mrs. Obama and Dr. Biden have placed a high emphasis on making this initiative effective. During the past two years, they've embarked on trips to visit military hospitals, military bases as well as hosting functions at the White House for troops and their families.

President Obama emphasized the importance of unity in making this initiative a success.

"Whenever I'm with our troops overseas, when I ask them what we can do for you, there's one thing they request more than anything else: 'Take care of my family.' Take care of my family," he said. "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."