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The American Legion

For God and country

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Vice president to Legion: Servicemembers, veterans owed a ‘sacred obligation’

HOUSTON -- Addressing The American Legion National Convention in Houston, Vice President Joe Biden told Legionnaires that U.S. servicemembers returning from war deserve the very best care and benefits possible – and that includes a job worthy of their service.

Speaking to a full hall at the George R. Brown Convention Center Aug. 27, Biden said servicemembers transitioning into the civilian workforce shouldn't have to cut through multiple layers of red tape to gain employment. That falls under what Biden called the one true sacred obligation: to support U.S. servicemembers, “and to care for and protect them and their families when they return,” he said. “That’s the only true sacred obligation.

“The president said, I think eloquently, no veteran who fought for his country should have to come home and fight for a job. We should not make any apologies for Veterans Preference. We make no apologies for pushing for automatic certification of veterans who have certified

skills from the United States military – or pushing for their spouses, when they move from state to state, to keep their licensure so they don't have to go through a whole range of different tests. If you can keep the supply lines through a certain territory, you sure as hell can manage a business supply chain. If you can command a platoon, you can manage a staff. If you're held responsible for billions of dollars in sophisticated equipment, you can handle billions of dollars of responsibility in corporate America.”

Along those lines, Biden announced two new Department of Labor rules to improve employment of veterans and for people with disabilities. One rule updates requirements under the Vietnam Era Veterans' Readjustment Assistance Act of 1974 by requiring contractors to annually adopt a benchmark either based on the national percentage of veterans in the workforce or their own benchmark, based on the best available data. The second updates those under Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 by introducing a hiring goal for federal contractors and subcontractors that 7 percent of each job group in their workforce be qualified individuals with disabilities.

Switching to those still in the military, Biden – whose son, Beau, served in Iraq while in the Army National Guard – said that the men and women fighting in Afghanistan aren't the only ones impacted by the war. “We have 60,000 warriors in Afghanistan,” he said. “Today, 60,000 families – multiples of that number – are doing what I watched my wife do every day and what you did

every day and your family did every day when you were deployed: Two, five, 10, 20 times a day muttering that silent prayer – ‘Please God, please God, keep them safe.’

“This war is not over. We cannot forget it's not just the sacrifices of our warriors. It's the sacrifices their families are making: missed weddings, funeral, birthdays, Christmases, Thanksgivings. These families are warriors as well, and they deserve – just like our warriors – respect, attention and admiration.”

Biden attended U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Ty Carter's Medal of Honor ceremony Aug. 26 at the White House and said Carter took an important step for all servicemembers when he acknowledged he suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder.

“He's fully acknowledged that he's battling, and in the process helping lift the perceived stigma, reaching out to thousands of fellow veterans who need help,” he said. “You're all trained not to complain, not to admit. It's written into your DNA that you don't ask for help because you have bad dreams, because you have panic attacks. Because you can't remember.

“Yesterday ... a young man, the bravest among us, said ‘I'm not ashamed. I need help.’ And God willing, with your help, that will propel thousands upon thousands of veterans coming home to seek the help they need.”

Biden said the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has added 1,600 mental health specialists to help deal with increased cases of PTSD. He also referenced a VA claims backlog that, while still too large, is diminishing.

“With your help, we've turned the corner and reduced the backlog by 20 percent,” he said. “(VA Secretary Eric) Shinseki has said we will not leave this problem for another secretary to solve, and he's a man of his word. With your continued help, we'll eliminate this backlog by 2015 and make sure it never happens again.”

Biden also touched on the headline issue in the world – the situation in Syria.

“There is no doubt an essential norm has been violated,” he said. “Chemical weapons have been used. Everyone acknowledges their use. No one doubts that innocent men, women and children have been the victims of chemical weapons attacks in Syria, and there is no doubt who is responsible – the Syrian regime. We know the Syrian regime are the only ones who have the weapons, have used chemical weapons multiple times in the past, have the means of delivering those weapons.”

“The president believes and I believe that those who use chemical weapons against defenseless men, women and children should and must be held accountable.”

Biden praised the Legion for its continued efforts on behalf of the U.S. military, its veterans and their families since its creation in 1919.

“That’s what the Legion knows better than almost any other organizations and individuals in all of America – the nature of that obligation,” he said. “That’s why you were formed in 1919. It’s the essence of your existence. Dedicated ‘to consecrate and sanctify our comradeship by devotion to mutual helpfulness.’ That’s what you’ve brought to the table. That’s what you’ve delivered to generation after generation of warriors. You kept the commitment.”

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