

Associated Press: First lady announcing one-stop job site for vets

By JIM KUHNHENN — Apr. 23, 2014 9:58 AM EDT

WASHINGTON (AP) — Aiming to streamline employment resources for people leaving the military, the government is creating an integrated website that can help job-seekers create resumes, connect with employers and become part of a database of veterans and their spouses for companies to mine for skills and talents.

First lady Michelle Obama was announcing the launch of the new Veterans Employment Center on Wednesday at Fort Campbell, Ky., during a special veterans' jobs summit organized by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, the Pentagon and the departments of Veterans Affairs and Labor.

"Our service members haven't always had the time or information they needed to prepare their resumes, to plot their career goals, to meet with employers and get the jobs they deserve," the first lady said in her prepared remarks. Mrs. Obama and Vice President Joe Biden's wife, Jill, have long been focused on the needs of veterans.

The one-stop job-shopping tool comes amid an increase in Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans as U.S. participation in those conflicts has ended or winds down. Unemployment among veterans who have served since September 2001 stood at 9 percent in 2013, about 1.6 percentage points higher than the overall civilian population.

The website, ebenefits.com, is the first online resource that combines information provided by a variety of agencies and employers. It will help veterans and military spouses build resumes, translate military skills into private-sector aptitudes and provide career and training data with the click of a mouse.

Dakota Meyer, a veteran of the war in Afghanistan and a Medal of Honor recipient, said the civilian and military worlds have a difficult time understanding each other. "It's something as small as in the military we call it a mission and in the corporate world they call it a project," he said.

Meyer, who is working with the Chamber of Commerce Foundation in its outreach to veterans, said the government's launch of its integrated jobs website will help bridge that gap.

"I was a sniper in the Marine Corps. How many jobs do you think the civilian world, the corporate world has for snipers? So how do you market that?" he said. "The tool will help translate your skills over to whatever the corporate world is going to understand.

So being a sniper — leadership skills, discipline, integrity, whatever-it-takes attitude, personnel management. These are skills that any corporation is looking for."

The Obama administration's most high-profile online tool, the HealthCare.gov site designed to enroll Americans in health plans, had a disastrous initial rollout last fall. But administration officials said Tuesday that they have tested the veterans site to ensure that it can handle the expected traffic and the various tasks it promises to carry out.

Wednesday's announcement is part of a month long series of events marking the third anniversary of Joining Forces, the nationwide initiative that Mrs. Obama and Jill Biden created in 2011 to boost employment, education and health care for active-duty service members, military families and veterans.

Biden, who will appear at Fort Campbell with Mrs. Obama, will also announce that the military spouses' employment program has enlisted 228 employers, up from the 60 companies that had made a commitment when the program launched in June 2011.

UPS is among the corporations that have pledged to hire more veterans, recruiting 13,000 veterans in the past 12 months, said Lytana Kids, UPS vice president for workforce planning. That's about 8 percent of the parcel delivery company's overall hires, compared with 5 percent before. An integrated website would make that task even easier, she said.

Ross Cohen, senior director of the veteran and military spouse employment program at the Chamber of Commerce Foundation, said it was easy for veterans to feel at a loss.

"Efforts like this one really make it easier to navigate toward a job," he said.

Online:

Benefits site: <https://www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits/jobs>