



United States Senate
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20510

June 3, 2009

Mrs. Michelle Obama
First Lady of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mrs. Obama:

In just a few short months you have made a significant impact on the public's appreciation of the debt we owe to the men and women who deploy to foreign wars and the loved ones they leave behind. In support of your efforts, I want to draw your attention to an innovative program in my home state, at Fort Lewis, WA, where base commanders and community service professionals have developed a new approach to supporting deploying troops and their families.

During the Memorial Day recess, I attended a 'deployment fair' at Fort Lewis for soldiers preparing to deploy to Iraq and Afghanistan and for their families. Instituted by Army Col. Cynthia Murphy, the deployment fair functions much like a trade fair. Booths set up under a big tent offer information on child care, credit counseling, emotional counseling, adult education for deployed soldiers as well as family back home, legal services, housing, and even car maintenance. This creative program replaces an eye-glazing three-hour PowerPoint presentation that provided far more information than preoccupied soldiers and relatives could absorb in one sitting. Typically, family services for deployed troops have focused on returning soldiers. The program at Lewis is geared toward providing military families with information they need *before* the troops leave home, and doing so in innovative and user-friendly fashion.

I proposed to base officials – and they reacted favorably to the idea – making some of this same information available online so that families could gain quick access to information, as needed, to help them manage these painful separations.

I am enclosing a letter urging Secretary of the Army Pete Geren to make the Fort Lewis program a model for all of our bases that send troops overseas. While each base commander should have the latitude to tailor programs for the specific needs of troops and families under his or her command, the Army should be quick to adopt ideas that work, especially when they benefit our military families who are sacrificing so much.

When your travels next take you to Washington state, please consider joining me at Fort Lewis to see this promising program first hand. Some 18,000 soldiers will be deploying from Fort Lewis for duty in Iraq and Afghanistan between now and the end of the year. With their welfare always in mind, I pledge to you my strong support of the administration's efforts to do all we can to support our military families.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Maria Cantwell', written in a cursive style.

Maria Cantwell
United States Senator

(Enclosure)