Mr. Chairman, this amendment is

straightforward. It would put a responsible end to combat operations in

Afghanistan by limiting funding to the safe and orderly withdrawal of

United States troops and military contractors.

Eleven years after Congress wrote a blank check for war without end,

which I could not support, the United States is still in Afghanistan.

Ever since that vote, I have introduced this Lee amendment--that

responsibly and safely brings our troops home--on numerous occasions

and at every opportunity. It is past time that Congress caught up, had

the debate, and passed this amendment.

Today, we have the opportunity to stand squarely with the war-weary

American people who want to bring our troops home. It is clear that the

American people have been far ahead of Congress in supporting an end to

the war in Afghanistan. The call has been growing across this land to

bring this war to an end, and it is past time for Congress to answer

that call.

After over a decade of war and over a half a trillion dollars in

direct costs--not a penny of it, mind you, paid for, and we talk about

deficit reduction--when we should have been actually investing in jobs

and our economy here at home, it is really time now to say enough is

enough. It is crucial to our economy and to the future of this country

to stop pouring billions into a counterproductive military presence in

Afghanistan. It is no wonder that 7 out of 10 Americans oppose the war

in Afghanistan. The American people have made it clear that the war

should end, that it should not go on for another year or 2 years and,

surely, not for another decade or more.

Mr. Chair, the costs of the war are unacceptable, particularly when

we ask what we gain by keeping our troops in Afghanistan through 2014.

The war in Afghanistan has already taken the lives of over 2,000

soldiers, has injured tens of thousands more, and has drained our

Treasury of over a half a trillion dollars. These costs will only go up

as we spend trillions of dollars on long-term care for our veterans,

which of course we must do.

As the daughter of a military veteran, I know firsthand the

sacrifices and the commitment involved in defending our Nation; but the

truth is our troops have been put in an impossible situation. There is

no military solution, and it is past time to end the war and to bring

our troops home. Quite frankly, it is time to use these savings from

ending the war to create jobs here at home. We need to provide for the

health care and economic security of our returning troops by rebuilding

the American economy.

The American people have made it clear that the war should end. Not

an extra day--not an extra dollar--should be spent extending the

decade-long war in Afghanistan. After 11 long years now, it is time to

bring our troops home.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. Chair, I'm pleased to be joined by my

colleagues in offering an amendment to set Pentagon spending at the

levels from the 2008 financial year adjusted for inflation, or at $500

billion.

I'm offering this amendment for one simple reason: the bloated

Pentagon budget must be addressed if we are serious about solving our

Nation's deficit. Quite frankly, our real national security is about

rebuilding our economy. It's time to use these tax dollars to create

jobs here at home.

It's time to rebuild America and also to provide for the health and

economic security of our brave troops and the communities that they

live in back here at home. Even with this modest cut--and it's very

modest at $19.2 billion--the Pentagon-based budget would still be, mind

you, a half trillion dollars, excluding war funding for Afghanistan,

far outpacing any other nation in defense spending.

Americans across the country have been forced to cut back, and many

are barely able to make ends meet while Pentagon spending has doubled

over the past decade. The United States spends as much on its military

as the next 14 countries combined, and all but three of these are close

allies. Americans believe no Federal agency should be immune from cuts,

including the Pentagon. In fact, the average American would pursue a

much larger cut of over $100 billion according to a poll released

earlier this week by the Stimson Center.

Some have argued that defense cuts will result in job losses. The

Pentagon, quite frankly, is not a jobs program. Even if it were,

defense spending creates fewer jobs per billion dollars spent than

investing in other sectors: education, health care, clean energy, or

even tax cuts.

The bloated Pentagon budget has been immune from oversight and

scrutiny for too long. We couldn't even pass my amendment yesterday

calling for an audit of the Pentagon. This really has resulted in

unbalanced spending where nearly 60 cents of every discretionary dollar

now goes to the Pentagon. If we are serious about addressing the

deficit, we must take reasonable steps to rein in Pentagon spending.

My amendment makes modest cuts to defense spending while protecting

our active military personnel and retirees from misguided efforts to

cut their compensation and health care expenditures by prohibiting the

additional cuts from coming from Active Duty and National Guard

personnel accounts from the defense health program. Let me repeat: not

a single penny would come from Active Duty and National Guard personnel

accounts or from defense health programs.

President Eisenhower famously said that the United States ``should

spend as much as necessary on defense,'' which we all agree with, ``but

not a penny more.''

At a time when American families, businesses, and government agencies

are facing budget cuts and tightening their belts, the Pentagon should

not be immune from the need to justify its expenses and guard against

waste, fraud, and abuse.

I am proposing a very modest proposal over the course of a decade

that would equal less than $200 billion, $200 billion. The Bowles-

Simpson Commission outlines $750 billion in suggested defense cuts in

the next decade.

President Reagan's Assistant Secretary of Defense, Lawrence Korb, has

proposed $1 trillion in cuts to the Pentagon over the next 10 to 12

years. As I said, the average American would cut 18 percent of the

Pentagon budget, or a little over $100 billion.

Finding $19 billion in savings next year is a very modest first step

after an unchecked decade of runaway Pentagon spending. While many

Americans would support a larger cut, this is a commonsense amendment

to change the direction of Pentagon spending towards a reasonable level

aligned with actual threats to our national security.

I hope my colleagues, many of whom speak out here on the House floor

frequently about the importance of addressing our deficit, will support

this amendment. If we are really concerned about the deficit, then vote

for this amendment.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The Lee-Van Hollen-Smith amendment would limit

Department of Defense funding to the amount authorized under the Budget

Control Act of 2011, resulting in a $7.6 billion reduction in spending

from the level authorized by the Appropriations Committee.

This amendment is cosponsored by my colleagues, Armed Services

Ranking Member Adam Smith, Budget Committee Ranking Member Chris Van

Hollen, and Representatives Amash, Blumenauer, Clarke, Johnson, Nadler,

Polis, Schrader, Stark, Welch, and Woolsey, among others.

As you know, Mr. Chair, last year, Congress passed the Budget Control

Act, which put in place spending caps on discretionary spending.

Despite these statutory limitations, the Appropriations Committee set

overall military spending billions of dollars above what the Pentagon

requested or what was agreed to under the Budget Control Act.

A deal is a deal. While many of us did not support the discretionary

caps under the Budget Control Act, our amendment simply brings Pentagon

spending in line with the law. Again, a deal is a deal. It does this

while protecting our Active Duty military personnel and retirees from

misguided efforts to cut their compensation and health care

expenditures, by prohibiting the additional cuts from coming from

Active Duty and National Guard personnel accounts or from the Defense

Health Program.

Let me repeat: not a single penny would come from Active Duty and

National Guard personnel accounts or from the Defense Health Program.

The Pentagon budget already consumes almost 60 cents out of every

discretionary dollar we spend, and adding billions of unrequested

dollars--mind you, unrequested dollars--at the expense of struggling

families during the ongoing economic downturn is wrong.

Once again, I just have to remind us that yesterday an amendment was

struck down, made out of order, that we still can't even get an audit

of the Pentagon; and here, once again, we're going against the law of

the land and violating a deal and asking for more money--outrageous.

At a time when American families, businesses, and government agencies

are facing budget cuts and tightening their belts, why shouldn't the

Department of Defense be asked to become more efficient and eliminate

wasteful programs?

While many of us would support a larger cut, this is a commonsense

amendment to keep spending in line with what was agreed to last year.

Remember, a deal is a deal.

I hope my colleagues, many of whom speak here on the floor frequently

about the importance of addressing our deficit, will support this

amendment. So I ask my colleagues, if we are really concerned with the

deficit, then vote for this amendment. This is money the Pentagon did

not ask for and it does not need.

Some of us really do believe that your word is your bond.

I yield back the balance of my time.