Mr. Chairman, I rise in opposition to the

gentleman's amendment. This amendment would basically prohibit funds

from being used to administer the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude

Battery test. This amendment would negatively impact both the education

and recruiting communities.

This test is administered free of charge on a voluntary basis. It's

on a voluntary basis to high school and college students as part of a

comprehensive Career Exploration Program. This program integrates

student aptitudes and interests to help them explore postsecondary

opportunities, including college, technical schools, and civilian as

well as military careers.

As education resources grow together, many schools rely on this free

test to provide a valuable career exploration experience. And we, as a

Nation, benefit from this test. Through this amendment, the gentleman

would effectively prohibit high schools from offering this test, which

would be unfortunate, and we are strongly opposed to the bill.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. Chairman, I rise in opposition to the

amendment.

Mr. Chairman, respectfully, I think this is an appropriate time to

remind our colleagues that under the Constitution, national defense is

the top priority of the House and Senate. Article I, section 8 gives

Congress specific authority to declare war, raise and support armies,

provide for a navy, establish the rules for the operation of American

military forces.

It was in this context that, under Chairman Young, our subcommittee

carefully reviewed, over many months, the President's budget and

Secretary Panetta's new strategic guidance for the Defense Department.

Frankly, we found the administration's approach lacking in many

respects. In several key areas, the subcommittee was concerned that the

level of risk tolerated by the Armed Forces was unacceptable. We've

talked a lot about that on the floor over the last couple of days.

As the Constitution requires, we made adjustments, which is our duty

and obligation. Yet even within the allocation that is $3.1 billion

higher than our President's request, our subcommittee could have done

more for our national security and for our troops, with more resources.

I want our colleagues to know that our subcommittee clearly

recognizes the size and nature of the Nation's deficit and debt. That's

why we found areas and programs for reduction that were possible

without adversely impacting the warfighter or any efforts towards

modernization and readiness.

Exercising our mandate to adhere to sound budgeting, we reclaimed

funding for programs that were terminated or restructured since the

budget was released by the President. We achieved savings from

favorable contract pricing adjustments and schedule delays. We cut

unjustified cost increases or funding requested ahead of need. We took

recisions and surplus from prior years.

Even with these steps to stretch our defense dollars, there remains

capability gaps:

In the Navy, we've heard a lot about that over the last couple of

days. Our fleet needs more ships. They've got more responsibilities in

the Asia Pacific;

The Air Force tactical fighters are aging rapidly. They've had a lot

of activity in Iraq and Afghanistan;

The Army is struggling to modernize its ground combat inventory;

The Marines need their version of the F-35, the Joint Strike Fighter;

We need to be prepared to respond to every future crisis. Who knows

where that may be.

Syria is engulfed in a civil war. North Korea is unpredictable.

Russia wants to reclaim its former glory. China is on the fast track to

a stronger military. Iran is working night and day to acquire nuclear

weapons. Al Qaeda, Hezbollah and other terrorist groups continue to

plot and plan.

Obviously, the future is challenging, to say the least; and we do our

troops and our citizens a disservice if we do not prepare for the next

crisis. Mr. Chairman, the legislation before us includes funding for

critical national security needs and provides the necessary resources

to continue the Nation's vital military efforts abroad.

The Department of Defense has already sustained significant budget

reductions. Cuts to the military have accounted for over half the

deficit reduction efforts achieved so far, nearly $500 billion, even

though national defense accounts for only 20 percent of the entire

Federal budget, which is sharply reduced from the 40 percent or more

before and during Vietnam.

These are real cuts, not simply reductions to planned future

spending. But given the military's urgent needs, their vital role in

maintaining global stability, and this House's responsibility to

protect America and Americans, I urge my colleagues to oppose this

amendment.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The committee is aware of the Department's

research into directed-energy capabilities and shares the gentleman

from Rhode Island's interest in ensuring that our warfighters have the

capabilities they need to operate in the complex environments of the

future.

I would assure the gentleman that the committee will continue to make

every effort to ensure that the Department of Defense is adequately and

effectively resourced to meet the challenges of the future, including

the transformational technologies such as directed energy.

We appreciate the gentleman's view. And I will

assure him that we'll look forward to working with him and the ranking

member, Mr. Dicks, to make sure that our warfighters can realize the

benefits of our Nation's research and development investments,

including directed energy.