Mr. Chairman, for generations, brave young men and

women from across the United States have answered the call of duty in

service of our Nation. Now, as the conflicts on foreign fields continue

to wind down, we must ensure that we do not lose sight of the need to

care for and provide for our returning veterans.

Our Nation has learned from generations of veterans that war does not

end when the camps are packed in, the planes are grounded, the ships

are docked, and our soldiers set foot on American soil.

General Washington once reminded us that the willingness with which

our young people are likely to serve in any war, no matter how

justified, shall be directly proportional to how they perceive the

veterans of earlier wars were treated and appreciated by their nation.

However, during these difficult economic times, our veterans are still

faced with challenges as they return to civilian life.

In March of this year, the Bureau of Labor and Statistics reported

that among veterans who have served in the post 9/11 era, the

unemployment rate is 12 percent higher than the national average. Among

young male veterans under the age of 24, the unemployment rate is 29

percent--nearly one-third are unemployed. One unemployed veteran is one

too many, but these statistics demonstrate an economic reality which is

quite unacceptable.

It is important to understand that this hardship comes not from a

lack of willingness to work by our veterans but rather from a lack of

opportunity. Consider that according to the most recent census, over

2.4 million of our Nation's veterans are now small business owners.

Veteran-owned companies now make up 9 percent of all U.S. firms. The

Small Business Administration now estimates that one in seven veterans

is self-employed or is a small business owner. And finally, nearly a

quarter of veterans say they're interested in starting or buying their

own business. So our veterans continue to do their part.

It is clear that our Nation's veterans are ready and willing to

invest in our economy if we provide them with the opportunities they

seek and, quite frankly, with the opportunities that they deserve.

With the President's announcement earlier this year that all of our

young men and women will be home from Afghanistan within the next 2

years, we, as a community and as a country, must begin working now to

ensure that we are providing our returning servicemen and -women with

job opportunities as they seek to reintegrate into civilian life.

To address this, I've offered legislation called the Fairness to

Veterans Act to provide the same preferences given to other preference

groups in Federal contracting. It levels the playing field for veteran-

owned businesses to help get our economy moving and our veterans back

to work. This amendment furthers the goal of the Fairness to Veterans

Act.

As our Nation struggles to achieve an economic recovery, we should be

looking to utilize the talent and leadership skills of our Nation's

veterans. These men and women volunteered to selflessly serve our

country and, in order to succeed, must display self-discipline and

leadership. It is character traits like these that should be nurtured

and fostered to help our economy grow again.

Ultimately, all of our efforts in the House must be focused on

putting our constituents back to work, and this legislation will do

just that by creating new opportunities for our veterans. With the

passage of this amendment, we will be one step closer to leveling the

playing field for our veterans.

The guidelines included in this amendment will provide veteran-owned

businesses with the access they need to grow and to create jobs. The

skill sets possessed by our highly trained veterans are unmatched

across the globe. In fact, our fighting men and women are,

unquestionably, the most highly trained, highly skilled workforce in

history. It is critical that we fully utilize their expertise to put

our economy back on the right track.

The men and women of the military have risked their lives in service

to us. This amendment is our opportunity to begin to repay that

incredible debt.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent to withdraw the

amendment in furtherance of working with staff to institute this policy

of fairness to veterans in a way that will benefit our returning

veterans and benefit our country.