Mr. Chairman, my amendment addresses one of

the most critical needs facing our men and women returning home from

Iraq and Afghanistan, and that is accessible and reliable prosthetic

and orthotic care for our veterans.

Like no war before, the war in Iraq has seen unprecedented numbers of

injuries due to surprise bomb attacks.

And like no other war before, troops are often surviving those

attacks, though many of them lose limbs. This bill creates new demands

and challenges for our health care system that we must provide for our

returning men and women. In addition, 20 percent of our practitioners

will be retiring over the next 10 to 20 years, a further need for

training.

My amendment today provides $20 million to expand the U.S. training

capacity for prosthetics and orthotics to the U.S. schools accredited

by the National Commission on Orthotic and Prosthetic Education.

This expansion will dramatically improve services for the Nation's

military amputees and orthopedically disabled returning from the

current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The need to provide more orthotic and prosthetic practitioners is

compelling. The demand for orthotic and prosthetic provider services is

expected to increase by 25 percent for orthotic care and 47 percent for

prosthetic care by 2020. At present, only 200 to 225 new practitioners

are trained each year in the United States.

On a broader scale, my amendment is an excellent investment in a

health field that will continue to grow. For example, over 1.2 million

individuals live with limb loss/absence in the United States.

Annually, physicians perform over 185,000 amputations in the United

States at about 507 a day. The number of amputations is expected to

rise due to devastating complications of diabetes. The growing need for

rehabilitation practitioners well trained in the various disciplines of

rehabilitation will continue to be a growing trend.

Finally, this funding will be an investment in our veterans hospitals

across the country.

I ask, Mr. Chairman, that my colleagues support this important

amendment.