

Opening Remarks by Chairman Rehberg

I call this hearing to order, and thank everyone for being here. Job creation and unemployment is the top challenge facing Congress right now. When we're talking about job opportunities for veterans, I think we understand urgency with which we need to identify and implement workable solutions.

I'm fortunate to represent the entire state of Montana, where we have the highest per-capita rate of veterans in the country other than Alaska. With a population of a million people, more than one out of ten people who live in Montana served their country in the armed forces. Montanans are proud of our veterans, and rightfully so.

For the men and women who answer the call to service, it's difficult to grasp the personal sacrifice involved. It's impossible to fully repay it. They're asked to uproot their lives and go where their grateful nation sends them in the cause of liberty. They must leave loved ones at home, as well as the stewardship of the homeland.

But in a lot of ways, this Administration has failed to maintain the homeland while our soldiers were away. Today's veterans are returning home to find an economy that has no place for them. There simply aren't enough jobs, and for the past three years, the federal government has been spinning its wheels. This Administration

borrowed trillions of dollars for so-called stimulus and for bailing out big banks, bankrupt governments and failing companies. We've got to do better.

We're here today to address veterans unemployment.

I believe that the one of the best way to help returning veterans find the jobs they need is to do what needs to be done to encourage broad economic recovery. As they say, a rising tide raises all ships. If our economy is producing more jobs for everyone, our vets will have more opportunities when they come home. To that end, I'm going to keep working with my colleagues here to get this economy back on track.

But once the jobs exist, there are still plenty of challenges to getting vets integrated into the work force. A 2010 study found that one out of four Post 9/11 veterans reported having a service-connected disability. In 2011, there were more than twice as many combat-related amputations than there were in 2009.

These soldiers are literally giving life and limb for the service of their country. What is their country prepared to offer them in return? I think this is one of those situations where everyone, Republican, Democrat, public and private wants the same outcome. How can we work together to leverage this to find the best solutions?

I look forward to hearing from the experts on our panel.

I know there are some very promising things happening on the private front. Microsoft's "Elevate America Veterans" program, for example, helps train vets and their spouses in hi-tech training and certifications.

On the public front, the Department of Labor oversees the Transition Assistance Program to help returning veterans reintegrate into the private sector job market. I think we can do more to leverage the valuable skills they learn in the service to the private sector.

As President Obama winds down our efforts in Afghanistan, it will become all the more important to ensure that our shared efforts are effective and efficient. In many cases, the challenges our men and women must overcome will last a lifetime. It's our job to make sure that, as a nation, we're there to provide whatever help we can for the long haul.

Sometimes the challenges we face in Congress are daunting. But when I see a young man who needs a job after serving two tours in the Middle East, I know we've got to find a way to work together. They handled their end of the bargain overseas, now I hope we can find a way to uphold our end on the home front.

Before turning to Ranking Member DeLauro, I'd like to personally welcome this distinguished panel. Mr. Ortiz and Mr. Schmiegel, both retired United States Marines, who left the Corps after at least 20 years

of service, continue to serve their country in an all-important civilian capacity. And, Mr. Carbone, who brings his vast experience associated with the Connecticut workforce system, is a perfect complement to the panel. I thank you all for appearing today, and look forward to your testimony. Ms. DeLauro....