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House of Representatives

The House met at 12:30 p.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. MILLER of Florida).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,
March 4, 2003.

I hereby appoint the Honorable JEFF MILLER to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

J. DENNIS HASTERT,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING HOUR DEBATES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 7, 2003, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning hour debates. The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to not to exceed 30 minutes, and each Member, except the majority leader, the minority leader, or the minority whip, limited to not to exceed 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from California (Ms. ROYBAL-ALLARD) for 5 minutes.

UNDERAGE DRINKING

Ms. ROYBAL-ALLARD. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to talk to my colleagues about an important subject that has a significant impact on our national public health and on our children: underage drinking. My interest in this topic began as a member of the subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations with jurisdiction over ONDCP, the Office of National Drug Control Policy.

During my first year on the committee, I was surprised to discover that although Congress had appropriated $2 billion to conduct a media campaign directed at the illegal use of drugs by children, ONDCP had inexplicably left out their illegal use of alcohol. I was surprised by that because while drinking under the age of 21 is illegal in all 50 States, over 10 million kids in the United States consume alcohol illegally, starting on average at age 13.

The research on the damage caused by underage drinking is dramatic, and let me cite just two examples: The first is based on research by the National Institutes of Health that found that young people who begin drinking before the age of 15 are four times more likely to become alcoholics than those who begin drinking after the age of 21. The second, and perhaps most compelling finding, is the one with a direct relationship to illegal drug use based on the study by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, known as CASA. This study found that underage drinkers are 22 times more likely to use marijuana and 50 times more likely to try cocaine than kids who do not drink under the age.

In 1999, the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. WOLF) and I attempted to add underage alcohol use to the ONDCP's youth antidrug media campaign. The Mothers Against Drunk Driving, the Center for Science in the Public Interest, the National Crime Prevention Council, and a number of other organizations long associated with these issues, supported our efforts. Unfortunately, very powerful interests in the alcohol industry lobbied against the amendment to include warnings to parents and kids about the dangers of underage drinking, and our amendment was defeated by the Committee on Appropriations.

Since that time, the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. WOLF), the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. WAMP), and I have introduced legislation to establish a separate national media campaign to reduce and to prevent underage drinking. Over 80 of our colleagues, both Republicans and Democrats, have sponsored this bill. Unfortunately, we have not been successful in passing the bill to date, but we will continue to make this fight.

The importance of this fight was again highlighted last week when the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, CASA, reported extremely troubling findings newsworthy enough to have appeared in the media across the Nation. CASA at Columbia University reported that teenagers account for nearly 20 percent of the alcohol consumed in the United States every year. Adding to this troubling finding is the fact that Dr. Susan Foster, who led the CASA study, published in the Journal of the American Medical Association, said that she believed that these new estimates were very conservative.

The President of CASA, Joseph Califano, a former secretary of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare and co-author of the CASA study, reported that approximately 5 million high school students admitted that at least once a month they consume five drinks on one occasion. This is extremely alarming since research suggests that alcohol, especially in large amounts, can harm the still developing teenage brain, not to mention the huge toll alcohol abuse has on the Nation, due to car accidents, injuries, high-risk sexual behavior and alcohol poisoning.

To address this looming crisis, Mr. Califano and three former U.S. surgeons general; Dr. Julius Richmond, who served under Jimmy Carter; Dr. David Satcher, who served under President Bill Clinton; and Dr. Antonia Novello, who served under George W. Bush; issued a nationwide call to action, asking parents, the public health community, and the alcohol industry

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