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House of Representatives

The House met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. WEBSTER of Florida).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

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

WASHINGTON, DC,
May 18, 2016.

I hereby appoint the Honorable DANIEL WEBSTER, to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

PAUL D. RYAN,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING-HOUR DEBATE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 5, 2016, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning-hour debate.

The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to 1 hour and each Member other than the majority and minority leaders and the minority whip limited to 5 minutes, but in no event shall debate continue beyond 11:50 a.m.

VETERANS EQUAL ACCESS AMENDMENT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER) for 5 minutes.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, one of the great tragedies of our time is our failure to adequately deal with the needs of our veterans returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan. We sent over 2 million brave men and women to fight under very difficult circumstances, to say the very least. While I was convinced from the beginning that the war was a tremendous

mistake, that is all the more reason that we should work to protect those veterans as they return home with wounds that are both visible and, in some cases, unseen.

It is no secret that these returning veterans have placed quite a strain on our VA facilities, which coincides with a national opioid epidemic. Prescription painkillers steal the lives of 78 Americans every day. Over 20,000 were killed last year, and it often leads to heroin addiction if their supply of opioid pills is interrupted.

As veterans with PTSD, chronic pain, and any number of ailments are looking for relief, lethal opioid overdoses among VA patients are almost twice the national average. We are doing something wrong. This is at a time when the overwhelming number of veterans say to me that marijuana has reduced PTSD symptoms and their dependency on addictive opioids. Yet the VA official policy prevents their doctors who know them best from talking to our veterans about this, even in States where it is legal.

In 24 States, the District of Columbia, and Guam, medical marijuana at the recommendation of a physician is legal. In those States, it is often used as an alternative to the addictive opioids to treat chronic pain. Fourteen States allow for medical marijuana to treat PTSD. Yet, veterans who are seeking relief from something that has proven to make a difference for many of their peers cannot get help from their VA doctor, even in States where medical marijuana is legal.

This is outrageous. It is time for us to acknowledge our debt to those veterans and allow their personal VA physician, the doctor who knows them best, to be able to consult with them about medical marijuana in accordance with State law.

My amendment doesn't authorize the possession or use of marijuana at VA facilities, but it would allow physicians

to treat the whole patient and to give them their best advice. We should not force our veterans to go to another doctor and pay for the service out of their own pocket with somebody who doesn't know them as well as their own doctor.

I would strongly hope that my colleagues would vote in favor of the Veterans Equal Access amendment in the MILCON-VA bill coming forward today. These men and women who have done so much for us and come home seeking help in dealing with health and coping with their return deserve our best. Forcing the VA to turn a blind eye to a potential useful therapy—something that is perfectly legal in their State—is not just shortsighted; I think it is cruel and unfair.

I have listened to the many stories of veterans who have found that medical marijuana has made a huge difference in their return, recovery, and readjustment. Importantly, it doesn't subject them to the danger of being part of the opioid epidemic that has been visited upon our veterans.

We can help stop the tragedy of VA veterans dying of opioid overdoses at nearly twice the rate of the rest of the population by at least allowing their doctors to work with them, considering medical marijuana as an alternative therapy.

COMMENDING THE SERVICE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. THOMPSON) for 5 minutes.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commend the service of law enforcement officers not only in Pennsylvania's Fifth Congressional District, but across Pennsylvania and the entire United States. As this week is National Police Week, it is especially important that we recognize

□ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., □ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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