

NATIONAL MEDICINE ABUSE
AWARENESS MONTH

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President, as Chairman of the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control, I rise in strong support of efforts being made across the country to reduce prescription drug abuse as part of National Medicine Abuse Awareness Month. In California, and throughout the country, the misuse and abuse of prescription and over the counter drugs is a significant problem. While the consequences are tragic and profound, they are also preventable.

According to the Office of National Drug Control Policy, prescription drug abuse is our Nation's fastest-growing drug problem. The U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's 2012 National Survey on Drug Use and Health found that over the past decade, the non-medical use of prescription drugs among persons 12 years or older rose from 1.9 million in 2002 to 11.1 million in 2011. The 2012 National Survey on Drug Use and Health estimates that the abuse of prescription medications such as pain killers, tranquilizers, stimulants, and sedatives is second only to marijuana, the No. 1 abused drug in the United States. The Centers for Disease Control have classified prescription drug abuse as an epidemic.

To combat the epidemic of prescription drug and over the counter medicine abuse, many community anti-drug coalitions are working to raise awareness about the negative consequences associated with the misuse of these drugs.

The North Coastal Prevention Coalition in California is just one example of a coalition pushing back against this problem. Together with San Diego County's Prescription Drug Task Force, the Coalition has worked to create county-wide Pain Prescribing Guidelines. They have helped facilitate National Take Back Days during which individuals are able to turn over unused prescription drugs. They also developed and disseminated a brochure on "Safe Pain Prescribing" to emergency room physicians.

I would like to acknowledge the critical efforts of the North Coastal Prevention Coalition and other anti-drug coalitions throughout the country in raising awareness about and combating the misuse of prescription medications. By designating October 2013 as National Medicine Abuse Awareness Month, Americans are able to reaffirm our national, state and local level commitment to living healthy, drug-free lives.

VA EMERGENCY CARE

Ms. HIRONO. Mr. President, on Monday I introduced a bill, S. 1588, with Senators MORAN, ISAKSON, and BEGICH to provide an emergency safety net to roughly 144,000 veterans waiting for VA care. I thank my colleagues for their

support. This bill fixes a catch-22 in current law that puts veterans who have recently returned from overseas at financial risk if they experience a medical emergency.

Under current law, a veteran enrolled in the VA system who receives emergency care at a non-VA facility can be reimbursed for those costs only if the veteran had also received care at a VA facility in the preceding 24 months. The intent of this requirement is to encourage veterans to seek preventative care, which decreases the need for more expensive emergency care. The problem is thousands of veterans have recently come home from overseas and they can't meet the 24-month requirement through no fault of their own. These veterans have scheduled their first new patient examination with VA, but they have not yet received their examination because of VA waiting times.

In other words, they haven't received their first VA appointment because of VA waiting times, but if they need to go to a non-VA hospital for a medical emergency VA cannot reimburse them because they haven't received their first VA appointment.

VA estimates 144,000 veterans are caught in this catch-22. With the war in Afghanistan ending, even more veterans will be affected. This is why veteran service organizations such as the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America are supporting this measure.

This bill gives VA the flexibility to reimburse veterans who have not yet received their new patient examination if the veterans have to go to a non-VA hospital for a medical emergency. For Hawaii veterans in rural Oahu or the neighbor islands who live far from VA facilities, emergency care outside the VA may be their only option. Just last week I met a veteran from Waianae who had a medical emergency while waiting 4 months for his first appointment at VA. Veterans such as he who were denied VA reimbursement would get much needed relief under this legislation.

In its FY2014 budget request, VA asked for the statutory authority provided by this legislation. The VA has already budgeted for this new authority in its FY2014 budget request, and the funding provided in H.R. 2216, as reported by the Senate Appropriations Committee on June 27, 2013, is sufficient to cover any additional costs VA will incur using this new authority.

I urge my colleagues to cosponsor this commonsense legislation. We owe it to our brave men and women in uniform who put their lives on the line for our country that the VA has the tools it needs to better serve new veterans accessing the care they have earned.

CONGRATULATING AZERBAIJAN

Mr. BURR. Mr. President, today I wish to congratulate and offer my support and encouragement to the people and government of Azerbaijan. On Oc-

tober 9 Azerbaijanis overwhelmingly reelected President Aliyev to a third five year term in only their fifth Presidential election since Azerbaijan gained its independence in 1991.

I, along with several of my colleagues, met privately with President Aliyev in Baku several months ago to discuss the great challenges facing Azerbaijan, the United States, and our allies in the region.

I took this opportunity to personally thank President Aliyev, his government, and the Azerbaijani people for their unwavering support for the United States government and its people.

President Aliyev was among the first few foreign leaders to call President Bush immediately after the attacks on 9/11 to offer his country's prayers and tangible support at a time of great crisis in our Nation.

The United States and Azerbaijan share many common strategic interests. Azerbaijan plays a vital role in efforts ranging from counter-terrorism, energy security, to the transit of U.S. and NATO supplies to and from Afghanistan.

As an important partner in the region, Azerbaijan is an active participant in NATO's Partnership for Peace program and was among the first nations to militarily support American led efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Azerbaijan's stability and prosperity in the South Caucasus, along with its continued commitment to democratic reforms, will serve as an important beacon of hope in a complex region.

NATIONAL LIBERTY MEMORIAL

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, I wish to speak today about an effort long championed by my predecessors in the Senate, Senators Dodd and Lieberman, and to express my commitment to carry on their work. That important project, the National Liberty Memorial, will commemorate the patriotism of African American soldiers during the American Revolution.

From the very first days of the American Revolution, African Americans took part in the effort to establish a new nation and secure liberty's blessings. They did this despite the fact that the vast majority of their brothers and sisters remained slaves.

Many of these African American patriots were from Connecticut. In 1976, the town of Milford established a memorial to six black soldiers of the Revolutionary War. Nero Hawley, a slave who joined the Continental Army and served at Valley Forge, was later freed after the war. You can visit his grave today at Riverside Cemetery in Trumbull. Jupiter Mars lived an extraordinary life, serving in the Continental Army during the war. He now rests in peace in beautiful Norfolk, CT. Cato Meed enlisted in the Continental Army in Norwich in 1777, and served at Valley Forge with General Washington.

These soldiers fought in every battle of the Revolutionary War, from the