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House of Representatives

TRIBUTE TO OPERATION UNITE FOR THE INAUGURAL NATIONAL RX DRUG ABUSE SUMMIT

HON. HAROLD "HAL" ROGERS

OF KENTUCKY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 19, 2012

MR. ROGERS: Mister Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Operation UNITE, the non-profit anti-drug organization in southern and eastern Kentucky for organizing the inaugural National Rx Drug Abuse Summit in Orlando, Florida April 10-12, 2012.

This small grassroots organization took on the enormous task of uniting federal, state and local officials on a national stage to discuss obstacles and solutions for the prescription drug epidemic plaguing our country. In its first year, the Summit garnered an outstanding audience of 750 attendees, along with national headliners including: the Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, Gil Kerlikowske; U.S. Surgeon General, Dr. Regina Benjamin; the Principal Deputy Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Dr. Ileana Arias; Deputy Assistant Administrator of the Office of Diversion Control with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Joseph Rannazzisi; the Director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), Dr. Nora Volkow; the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC); and four members of the Congressional Caucus on Prescription Drug Abuse, including myself, U.S. Rep. Mary Bono-Mack of California, U.S. Rep. Jack Kingston of Georgia, and U.S. Rep. Nick Rahall of West Virginia.

As a nation, we can no longer afford to sit quietly on the sidelines. The epidemic now claims more lives every year through drug overdoses than any other accidental death, according to the CDC. During the Summit, Director Kerlikowske called it a public health crisis, noting prescription drug abuse is the fastest growing drug problem in the country. In Kentucky, we are losing 82 people a month to drug abuse – more than car crashes. This Summit brought forth the realization that unsecure medicine cabinets are more dangerous than our cars.

President & CEO, Karen Kelly, highlighted the multi-pronged approach of the UNITE organization on the national stage as a model for the rest of the country. The Summit featured sessions on healthcare, advocacy and prevention, human resources, treatment and law enforcement. Together, leaders from each field shared resources and information at the Summit, crossing industry lines and state boundaries, for the first time in some areas.

Mister Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me in congratulating Operation UNITE on a successful inaugural National Rx Drug Abuse Summit. They tossed a pebble into a big pond and I believe the ripple effect will be tremendous in the years to come.