

REPUBLICANS

DAVID P. ROE, TENNESSEE, CHAIRMAN

GUS M. BILIRAKIS, FLORIDA
MIKE COFFMAN, COLORADO
BRAD WENSTRUP, OHIO
AMATA RADEWAGEN, AMERICAN SAMOA
MIKE BOST, ILLINOIS
BRUCE POLIQUIN, MAINE
NEAL DUNN, FLORIDA
JODEY ARRINGTON, TEXAS
JOHN RUTHERFORD, FLORIDA
CLAY HIGGINS, LOUISIANA
JACK BERGMAN, MICHIGAN
JIM BANKS, INDIANA
JENNIFFER GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN, PUERTO RICO

JON TOWERS, STAFF DIRECTOR

DEMOCRATS

TIM WALZ, MINNESOTA, RANKING

MARK TAKANO, CALIFORNIA
JULIA BROWNLEY, CALIFORNIA
ANN KUSTER, NEW HAMPSHIRE
BETO O'ROURKE, TEXAS
KATHLEEN RICE, NEW YORK
J. LUIS CORREA, CALIFORNIA
KILILI SABLAN, NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS
ELIZABETH ESTY, CONNECTICUT
SCOTT PETERS, CALIFORNIA

RAY KELLEY
DEMOCRATIC STAFF DIRECTOR

U.S. House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

ONE HUNDRED FIFTEENTH CONGRESS

335 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515

<http://veterans.house.gov>

January 16, 2018

The Honorable David Shulkin
Secretary
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, Northwest
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Shulkin,

We are writing in response to your letter dated December 21, 2017 and delivered electronically to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs on December 28, 2017, nearly 45 days past its November 14, 2017 deadline.

While we share your dedication to improving the care of veterans with chronic pain and PTSD, we are concerned VA has not explored all treatment options. We urge you to join us and the 90% of veterans who are in favor of VA research into medical cannabis. Based on the report referenced in the letter's attached 'fact sheet,' "There is virtually no conclusive information about the benefits of cannabis in chronic pain or PTSD populations and limited information on harms, so methodologically strong research in almost any area of inquiry is likely to add to the strength of evidence."

In addition, the 'facts' listed in the attachment are misleading and seemingly biased. For example, you allege, "...review and analysis of epidemiological studies in general populations found significant increased odds of suicide." As you are likely aware, epidemiological studies often feed the *cum hoc ergo propter hoc* fallacy that states that because two events happen at the same time, in this case suicidal tendencies and cannabis use, that one event caused the other. However, this is often not the case, and should spur interest in more sound, thorough studies in order to properly inform your clinicians, your veteran-patients, and public health. To perpetuate incomplete, uninformed statements based on scientifically-contested research, is arguably in direct contradiction with your mission to "advance health care for Veterans and the Nation."

As a result, we would like to clarify and reiterate our request from October 26, 2017. As is clear from the letter, we are specifically interested in the impact of **medical** cannabis on veterans suffering from chronic pain and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Although the 'factsheet' is titled "Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Marijuana and Opioid Fact Sheet," there is no reference to medicinal grade cannabis in the body of the 'factsheet,' and of the nine references to medical cannabis in your 130 page underlying report each is in reference to research where participants reported that pain symptoms decreased significantly when MS patients were provided with either THC or THC combined with CBD as part of a double-blind, placebo-controlled, crossover trial.

Due to these inconsistencies and your failure to address our original request, we **again** ask VA to respond, in kind, with a commitment to the development of VHA-led research into this issue. If VA is unable to make this commitment, we ask VA to outline any and all external and internal barriers to the pursuit of the research to the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs by **February 1, 2018**.

If you have any questions, please have a member of your staff contact Ms. Megan Bland, Professional Staff Member, at (202) 225-9756 or by email at megan.bland@mail.house.gov.

Sincerely,



Tim Walz
United States House of Representatives



Mark Takano
United States House of Representatives



Beto O'Rourke
United States House of Representatives



J. Luis Correa
United States House of Representatives



Scott Peters
United States House of Representatives