

Opening Statement of the Honorable Fred Upton
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
Hearing on “What is the Federal Government Doing to Combat the Opioid Abuse
Epidemic?”
May 1, 2015

(As Prepared for Delivery)

Today we continue our important review of the opioid abuse epidemic. In recent weeks we have heard valuable testimony from academics and state and local leaders, including folks on the frontlines in Southwest Michigan, and today we will hear what the federal government is doing to combat this pressing issue.

The abuse of painkilling opioids and heroin is a complex and growing public health crisis that has sadly been outpacing the nation’s efforts to reverse this epidemic. A lot of people are dying, and a lot of families are suffering. In Kalamazoo County, where the reality of heroin overdoses has hit hard, we remember two young women who were friends. In 2008, we lost Amy Bousfield at 18 years old. In 2012, her friend Marissa King died at 21 years old. Marissa began using heroin in 2009, despite having lost two friends to the drug. Marissa was diagnosed with bipolar disorder, had struggled with depression, and had abused prescription drugs before turning to heroin after graduating from high school.

Every community has been hit by heartbreak. According to the Michigan Department of Community Health, “Unintentional poisoning deaths in Michigan involving opioids comprise 20 percent of unintentional poisoning deaths in 2012, compared to 11 percent in 1999. Unintentional poisoning deaths involving opioids increased more rapidly than those from any other drug.” This subcommittee’s diligent review of every perspective of this issue is important.

Last week, we took an important step. The House approved bipartisan legislation co-authored by the full committee Vice Chairman Marsha Blackburn, and Representatives Tom Marino, Peter Welch, and Judy Chu to clarify language in the Controlled Substances Act and promote collaboration between agencies and stakeholders to ensure patients have access to medications.

But this subcommittee’s hearings have shined a light on how much more needs to be done. Our review has introduced us to many health professionals, scientists, community leaders, and public servants who are working their hearts out to make a difference and to help reduce this problem. There are a number of worthy ideas on how to strengthen the federal response.

To take on the enormous challenge posed by the opioid abuse epidemic, we need to be unified and find common ground. These hearings provide a foundation for this committee to proceed in a bipartisan fashion to take constructive and effective actions. I am ready to work with my colleagues on the committee on both sides of the aisle, the president, Secretary Burwell, and the rest of the administration to produce positive results in fighting this epidemic for the American people.

We want to help. I welcome our distinguished federal government witnesses and look forward to their testimony.

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