

Thank you Chairman Walden and Chairman Burgess for giving me the opportunity to speak on behalf of my constituents. As has been noted, the opioid epidemic is not an isolated issue. It is a nationwide issue and it deserves our attention. The New York Times noted last month that the opioid epidemic is killing more people per year right now than the HIV epidemic did at its peak in the nineties. These drugs do not discriminate based on gender, race, social class, or age and they destroy lives, families, marriages, and careers.

In my home state of North Carolina, the opioid epidemic has really hit hard. North Carolina is home to four cities in the top 25 of worst cities affected by this crisis, one of which is in my district-- Fayetteville. One particularly devastating story that has stuck with me was from a constituent I met while touring a treatment facility in my district. He was a police captain – the son of a police chief in the same town – and injured his back on the job and was prescribed an opioid following surgery. He told me he vividly remembers becoming addicted the first time he took one of these medications. Within a year, he was a full blown heroin addict. He's since recovered and now mentors addicts going through treatment, but his story has an unusually happy ending.

Fayetteville is also home to soldiers and veterans who have become addicted after being prescribed opioids for injuries sustained in combat or training. One problem with this epidemic is the VA does not have enough inpatient beds to treat every veteran so oftentimes veterans go without help and are forced to self-medicate by using opioids acquired on the black market. We need to find real solutions so we can put an end to this heartbreak.

I am proud to have worked last Congress on this Committee's investigation into the opioid addiction which resulted in the passage of both the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act and the 21st Century Cures act. These laws have made huge steps forward in the treatment and prevention of opioid addiction, but it is clear we have work left to do. One idea I am working on is expanding access to safe ways to dispose of prescription drugs, particularly opioids. DisposeRx, a company in my district, manufactures a powder that mixes with water inside the pill bottle and renders any unused opioids not only inaccessible and inextricable, but also bio-degradable. It is innovative ideas like this that we need to explore and I look forward to working with colleagues on Committee to help treat and prevent opioid addiction.