

Remarks by Congressman Keith Rothfus (R-PA-12) before the Energy & Commerce Committee

October 11, 2017

Thank you Mr. Chairman for holding this important hearing today for members from across the country to testify about this epidemic.

I think it is interesting that you've had three Pennsylvanians right in a row. It represent the geography of Pennsylvania; Eastern, Middle and Western.

Certainly communities in Western Pennsylvania are among those hit hardest in the National opioid epidemic. There has been a staggering amount of overdose deaths, specifically in my district. In 2016, Allegheny County had 648 individuals lose their lives from heroin or opioid-related overdoses. Last year that number was 4,342 in Pennsylvania alone.

According to a recent article in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, in 2016, the number of overdose deaths in Pennsylvania was four-times the number of deaths caused by car accidents. In other recent reports, three people in my district were revived by Narcan after each overdosed at a convenience store. Thankfully, the first responders were able to save their lives.

While it is encouraging to see that both Congress and the Administration have taken action to address this issue, we still have a long way to go. From my perspective, we should take a three-prong approach to combating the epidemic.

We must implement measures to prevent addiction. We must treat addiction once it has taken hold over someone. Finally, we must vigorously enforce the laws on the books to stop drug traffickers from spreading their poison into our communities.

To help combat this, I led an effort to include language in the landmark Comprehensive Opioid Reduction Act that will help ensure our veterans, who are at significant risk, have access to the specialized programming they need to prevent or overcome opioid addiction. This is one positive step in the right direction.

Another area where Congress should focus, one of which is of specific interest to me, is to increase and strengthen our partnership with Mexico, especially through the State Department's Merida Initiative. Our neighbor to the south has suffered a horrific level of murder at the hands of drug cartels. By increasing our cooperation with Mexico we can help them defeat the cartels that cause so much pain both there and here in the US. Often overlooked, is the fact that many of the narcotics that Mexican cartels traffic end up in the hands of Americans.

Furthermore, increasing security at ports of entry through increased use of technology, cameras, and man-power is absolutely necessary to interdicting drugs. Pending legislation, like Chairman McCaul's Border Security for America Act, will do just that.

Another bipartisan bill that I hope can help end the crisis is one that I introduced with Congressman Collin Peterson, H.R. 3526 [the Border Protection Fund Act], I look forward to that moving forward.

Again, I sincerely thank you for the opportunity to testify before the committee this morning on an issue that greatly affects my constituents and our country.