
THE HONORABLE DAVID YOUNG (IA-03)
TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE ENERGY & COMMERCE SUBCOMMITTEE ON
HEALTH
OCTOBER 11, 2017

Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank the committee for holding this hearing.

I want to highlight the actions the community of Bridgewater, Iowa has undertaken in the last year to take back their town.

Bridgewater, a small town of around 200 in the heart of Adair County in southwest Iowa, is facing a problem with opioids and a range of other drugs.

As drug use in the area slowly started to rise in the community, which relies on the county sheriff's office to keep them safe, the residents were unable, but not unwilling, to stop the influx of drugs into their town.

Residents of Bridgewater started to see cars coming into town with out of state license plates, and from counties across the state.

As the cars came, so did the crime.

Residents and law enforcement noticed an uptick of crimes - theft and vandalism - which traced back to drug users and dealers coming to town.

Empty houses turned into drug houses powered by gas and generators, which led to more than four houses burning to the ground.

Last spring, residents were fed up as they saw the town they were raised in slipping away. They decided to take action.

Concerned residents met in the basement of a church to find a way to save their town. This is when they decided to take back Bridgewater.

Residents formed a non-profit to fight the drug crisis together. As word spread, media outlets across the state came to this small town to shine a light on one of many communities suffering in the Third District.

I visited Bridgewater in April to meet with residents in that church basement as they began their mission to make their town safe again. I studied their faces. I listened intently. And their mission is my mission.

They started to hold forums with drug counselors, law enforcement, state and local legislators, and other individuals offering help.

As residents started to clean up their town they were met with hostility and retaliation from drug dealers and users.

Leaders of the Take Back Bridgewater movement were run off the road, swerved at by those who wanted to protect the status quo. A number of other incidents occurred, but the residents pressed on. The citizens of Bridgewater will not surrender.

As neighboring communities saw what the residents of Bridgewater were doing, they wanted to do the something in their communities.

Leaders from towns across southwest Iowa often discuss strategies together to protect their neighbors.

That is what Iowa is all about, neighbors helping neighbors, communities helping communities.

Just last night, residents of Bridgewater gathered in the basement of that very same church to kick off a fundraiser for their nonprofit. They will be going throughout southwest Iowa to sell Christmas wreaths to adorn the doors of homes throughout the region.

Residents will use the funds to take back their community. Bridgewater will not turn a blind eye to opioids and drugs in their community. And of course we must not forget this this human tragedy of addiction and desperation. This epidemic is enslaving and killing our sons and daughters; mothers and fathers.

As the federal government addresses this issue, it is my hope we use Bridgewater as an example local communities can have the largest impact if we partner with them and helping with the tools they need to be successful. A one-size-fits-all program will not save as many lives as

a solution tailored to each community which has the buy in of its residents.

Take Back Bridgewater is not just a slogan. It's an action plan. It's a reality. And it's happening. And it's not just happening in Bridgewater, it's happening all around the country.

Thank you again for the opportunity to join you today.