

Committee on Energy and Commerce

Opening Statement

of

Subcommittee on Health Ranking Member Gene Green

February 28, 2018

Combatting the Opioids Crisis: Helping Communities Balance Enforcement and Patient Safety

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank you for your work on addressing the opioid epidemic that has impacted countless families and communities in our country.

According to the National Institutes of Health, 115 Americans die every day after overdosing on opioids. The misuse and addiction to opioids, including prescription pain relievers, heroin, and synthetic opioids, such as fentanyl, is a serious national crisis that affects public health, as well as our social and economic welfare.

The pattern of lives ruined and lost due to the opioids epidemic must be reversed. The opioids epidemic is complex and multifaceted, however. There are no simple and quick fixes.

Ending this crisis will require better coordination of care, community involvement in finding solutions, and more consistent use of improved pain-control options. A comprehensive response to this crisis must address the limited resources currently available, the societal ills that fuel addiction and the stigma attached to drug abuse.

In recent years, Congress has acted in this space. The Affordable Care Act expanded health care coverage to 20 million non-elderly Americans, giving access to the medical and behavioral attention opioid victims need to overcome addiction.

Any honest effort by Congress to address the opioids epidemic must include measures to stabilize and strengthen the exchanges, and make coverage accessible for Americans who currently do not have health coverage, including the three million Americans who lost their health insurance in 2017.

Last Congress, I was proud to support the passage of the 21st Century Cures Act and the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (CARA). CARA authorized several grant programs to help prevent overdose, expand access to treatment, and help individuals recover. Unfortunately, some of the grants created under CARA have yet to receive funding through the appropriations process. I hope our committee will work with our colleagues on the Appropriations Committee and secure these necessary funds.

Speaking with local stakeholders at home about the opioids crisis, I can share that more federal assistance is needed to properly combat this epidemic. Our committee needs to seriously consider authorizing the necessary resources that our state and local partners need to help Americans struggling with opioids addiction and recovery.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today and continuing our committee's examination of this nationwide problem in the weeks and months ahead.

Now, I would like to yield one-and-a-half minutes to my friend and colleague, Congresswoman Matsui of California.

[After yielding back . . .]

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield the remainder of my time.