

**Republican Leader Cathy McMorris Rodgers**  
**Health Subcommittee Hearing**  
**“An Epidemic within a Pandemic: Understanding Substance Use and**  
**Misuse in America”**  
**April 14, 2021**  
*As Prepared for Delivery*

**INTRO**

Thank you, Chair Eshoo.

And, thank you to the witnesses.

America remains in the midst of two national emergencies – COVID-19 and the substance use disorder crisis.

Experts—including law enforcement, the DEA, and local leaders in my community—are raising the alarm.

We are losing more people to the deaths of despair.

The social isolation...economic shutdowns... stress... fear... loneliness have taken a severe toll.

According to the CDC, 88,000 people died of an overdose in the 12 months leading up to August 2020.

That's 26.8 percent increase...

... and comes after the CDC released May data that we had the highest number of overdose deaths in our recorded history.

This is how one mental health experts in Eastern Washington put it:

“A situation such as 2020 — that really stressed even the strongest-willed of us — it can really impact how they're feeling, and it can increase their need for a substance use as a way to protect themselves, as a way to find that comfort they're used to having.”

[pause]

People need hope—hope to overcome fear... change their lives... provide for their families... and thrive.

That's what is on the line as we work to address this epidemic within the pandemic head on.

## **SOLUTIONS**

While I have some concerns with some of these bills...

.... I'm pleased that we are coming together to improve prevention, increase access to treatment, and offer support to those in recovery.

All of this will build on our historic bipartisan work on the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act...Cures... and the SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Act.

Energy and Commerce has a rich history on leading the most significant efforts against the addiction crisis.

Today, I'm hopeful we can move more solutions across the finish line.

## **FENTANYL AND FENTANYL-RELATED SUBSTANCES**

That includes stopping the scourge of fentanyl coming across our southern border from Mexico and also from China.

Nearly all states are seeing a spike in synthetic opioid deaths—with 10 western states reporting a more than 98 percent increase.

In Washington state, it's even worse. The fentanyl positivity rate increased by 236 percent. That's the highest nationwide.

Last fall, we lost two teenagers in Eastern Washington to potential fentanyl exposure.

We've also had close calls with police officers who barely came in contact with fentanyl.

Just a few milligrams—what can fit on Lincoln’s ear on a penny—is lethal.

The analogues are oftentimes more potent.

## **STOPPING ANALOGUES**

If it’s reaching our streets in Washington state in deadly quantities from Mexico—I can assure you this scourge is everywhere.

That’s why the Drug Enforcement Agency created a temporary scheduling order for fentanyl analogues, placing these dangerous substances in Schedule I.

Previously, drug traffickers could slightly change the chemical structure of fentanyl, so the novel formula was not considered prohibited.

The DEA would then have to individually schedule each variant. Once one analogue was scheduled, a new one would emerge, creating a game of “whack a mole” for drug control efforts.

With class-wide scheduling, any dangerous variant of fentanyl is controlled under Schedule I.

This allows law enforcement to combat all “fentanyl-related substances,” and protect the public.

For example, one recently encountered substance was approximately 8-times more potent than fentanyl.

The scheduling order is set to expire in less than a month.

Given the House schedule, Speaker Pelosi must make this a priority for this week or next.

I fear that like last year, the Majority is waiting until the last minute.

We should work with the DEA and other agencies to make this scheduling permanent—like with Mr. Latta’s Fight Fentanyl Act.

We should also look for reforms that encourage scientific research.

If the Majority won't act on a permanent solution, then we must temporarily extend it immediately.

Judiciary Republican Leader Jordan and I are leading for a one-year extension to buy us time.

The clock is ticking.

If Speaker Pelosi allows this to expire...

Customs and Border Protection will lose the authority to seize these substances at Ports of Entry...

... and drug traffickers regain the incentive to push deadlier and deadlier drugs on our streets.

There is no excuse to let May 6 come and go without us doing our jobs to keep people safe, break this cycle of despair, and build a more prosperous future for America.