

Statement for the Record from Representative John Katko (R-NY)
"The Overdose Crisis: Interagency Proposal to Combat Illicit Fentanyl-Related Substances."
December 2, 2021

Thank you, Madam Chair, Ranking Member Guthrie, and Members of the Subcommittee. I appreciate the opportunity to share my perspective on this crisis as the Ranking Member of the Committee on Homeland Security.

I would like to thank the Health Subcommittee for holding this very important hearing to discuss the drug overdose crisis in the United States. I, like so many of my colleagues, find the statistics for drug overdoses, overdose deaths, and drug seizures incredibly concerning. Most of the drugs that caused these overdose deaths were primarily laced with a synthetic opioid, like fentanyl.¹

As a former federal organized crime prosecutor, I spent part of my time on the border in El Paso, Texas going after cartels. The cartels know when the border is secure because it's much more difficult for them to get their drugs across. But as we know, the cartels are currently taking advantage of the chaos that President Biden created at the southwest border. When the President opened the border this year and allowed people to flow into the country, the cartels became emboldened to peddle their poisonous drugs to American citizens.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Americans are dying at unheard-of numbers from drug overdoses and at the same time, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), is seizing enough fentanyl at the border to kill every man, woman, and child in the United States seven times over. I commend our brave men and women at CBP who are on the frontline of this crisis, but we are asking them to perform an impossible task. We must do better not only for them but for the communities across this country that continue to be impacted by this scourge.

In my district in upstate New York last week, we had 14 overdose deaths in one night. In Onondaga County alone, fentanyl was involved in 85 of the 93 opioid deaths that occurred in the first half of this year. The southern border may be thousands of miles away from New York, but every community in the United States is impacted by the flow of illicit narcotics coming across the border and pouring into our country.

Despite what the Secretary of Homeland Security thinks, the southwest border is not secure nor is it closed, and the cartels know it. CBP data shows an uptick in the number of seizures of illicit narcotics, especially fentanyl. And what's worse is that we don't know the true amount of illicit narcotics which are successfully smuggled into the interior of the United States.

The American overdose crisis is not unrelated to the humanitarian crisis along the southwest border. Most migrants are smuggled across the border by paying the cartels. Many of these migrants can't afford to pay the cartels thousands of dollars, so they are often used as drug mules

¹ Americans are overdosing on a drug they don't know they're taking accessed at <https://www.cnn.com/2021/11/17/politics/fentanyl-overdose-deaths-what-matters/index.html>

to repay their debt. We are being complicit in strengthening the cartels' grip on drug distribution networks in the United States by having an open border.

Today's hearing is an opportunity to discuss the facts of the overdose crisis and how securing our border would have a positive impact on reducing the supply of drugs that are killing Americans across the United States in record numbers.

Thank you again to Chairwoman Eshoo and Ranking Member Guthrie for holding this hearing on an incredibly important topic.