

## **Health Hearing on Fentanyl, 2.1.23**

I would like to thank the gentlemen from Kentucky our Chairman for holding this critically important hearing and for our witnesses' participation.

In 2021, the United States hit a truly dispiriting milestone by recording 107,735 drug poisoning. This number represents a 16% increase over 2020, which previously held the unfortunate record for poisoning deaths.

Let me repeat that – 107,735 of our fellow Americans, our brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, and our kids, died from drug poisoning in one year's time. This represents more

fatalities than the wars in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan combined.

The main culprit for this explosion in deaths is fentanyl. Abuse of this synthetic drug is now the leading cause of death in Americans aged 18 to 45.

After passage of H.R. 6, the SUPPORT Act, in the 115<sup>th</sup> Congress, we had a slight decline in poisoning, 62,172. However, after increased pressure at our southern border, there was an increase in poisoning for 2020 leading to 83,558 deaths.

Fentanyl is particularly popular with the criminal drug cartels that operate illicit labs in Mexico and other locations. This is mainly due to the basic nature of its production and utilization of cheap ingredients. Fentanyl

is also 50 times stronger than heroin and 100 times stronger than morphine, making it highly addictive and profitable for drug dealers.

According to DEA testimony, the Mexican cartels, are making fentanyl laced pills for ten cents. They are killing Americans for ten cents.

Due to President Biden's failed and hollow border policies, smugglers have been given the green light to take advantage of the situation by profiting off of the distribution of these weapons of mass destruction in our communities.

On top of these statistics, a recent Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) report concluded that one in three Americans had a

mental illness or substance use disorder in 2021. Sadly, nearly 94% of those suffering did not receive the treatment they needed due to heavy handed and ill-advised lockdowns.

How many more lives will be lost before something is done to finally address this poison killing our communities?

We are tired of waiting and have been calling for swift action. That is why I introduced the HALT Fentanyl Act with my friend and colleague the gentlemen for the 8<sup>th</sup> district of Virginia,

Our legislation would permanently schedule fentanyl related substances as Schedule I and enable researchers to

continue to study Schedule I substances for possible medical benefits.

Again, I want to thank our witnesses for being here today and I look forward to working with you to end the decades old substance use crisis. I yield back.