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Governor, State of Arizona

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Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security of the Committee on Homeland Security

Field Hearing: "An Unsecure Border and the Opioid Crisis: The Urgent Need for Action to Save Lives"

Chairwoman McSally, Congressman Grijalva, distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, and other Members in attendance, thank you for this opportunity to appear before you to discuss one of the most significant public health and safety emergencies our nation and the State of Arizona has faced in a generation — the opioid crisis and the interrelated priority of securing our nation's borders.

Let's start with the need to secure the border.

From the earliest days in my administration, I've had the opportunity to spend time with Arizona's border Sheriffs along with numerous everyday residents, citizens and ranchers in our border communities.

The concerns they have expressed for their safety and security are real and it's our job to listen and take action.

I am grateful for the strong partnerships our state and local law enforcement have established with the US Department of Homeland Security over many years.

In 2015, former Secretary of Homeland Security Jeh Johnson was in town helping coordinate security efforts for the Super Bowl. We had such great success working together that I thought: "why can't we continue this type of collaboration to secure the border?"

Working with that cooperative spirit, in partnership with the Department of Homeland Security, in 2015 we established the Arizona Border Strike Force.

This intra-agency team has without a doubt made Arizona and our entire country safer. One example of many large-scale efforts by the Border Strike Force is Operation Organ Grinder which resulted in the seizure of more than 4,000 pounds of marijuana and the arrest of 73 felons.

To date, the Border Strike Force has kept 15.3 hits of heroin off our streets.

And it's not just drugs. What began as a traffic stop in Cochise County led to the discovery of a juvenile run-away who was the victim of horrific sex trafficking crimes.

The primary suspect was sentenced to 20 years in prison and will face a lifetime of supervised probation and sex-offender registration.

We are grateful that the new Administration has amplified these efforts even further. President Trump's deployment of the National Guard has brought additional boots on the ground to our border — they are needed and welcomed. And both General John Kelly and Current DHS Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen have not only visited our state to tour the border with me, but they have delivered on support and resources.

They are finally making Washington, D.C. listen. And after recently visiting all four of our border counties — I can tell you: The residents in these communities could not be more grateful.

When it comes to the opioid epidemic, overdoses and deaths have indeed reached crisis levels.

Last year alone, 800 Arizona moms, dads, brothers, sisters, family members and friends were claimed by this scourge.

It's why we are all here today. From across the state, and from both political parties -- because we've all seen the consequences, and we all know this is not a partisan issue.

The collaborative process under which our plan was developed, with stakeholders from across the state, and the way Democrats and Republicans came together to pass it unanimously, is an example to our nation of what can be accomplished when we put politics aside.

The Public Health State of Emergency I declared last June began a process of collaboration between the Arizona Department of Health Services, law enforcement, hospitals, medical professionals, addiction specialists and other community stakeholders to fight this crisis head-on.

The declaration allowed us to collect information on opioid overdoses, deaths, cases of newborns experiencing withdrawal from opioids, and naloxone use on a 24-hour basis — something no other state has done.

From there, our Department of Health Services worked to analyze the data and identify solutions focused on prevention and treatment.

For Arizonans dealing with chronic pain and participating in a responsible treatment plan, we know how critical these medications are. So we made sure that they were involved every step of the way too.

During a special session this January, we addressed every facet of this fight, from the need to protect Good Samaritans and end pill mills, right down to the physical packaging of the drugs themselves.

In fact, all opioid prescription bottles in our state will now have red caps to alert patients to the high-risk of these drugs and the need to keep them away from children.

One of our most significant accomplishments was a result of bipartisan collaboration to improve access to treatment with a 10 million dollar investment that will help uninsured and underinsured people get the treatment they need.

Since declaring a State of Emergency last June, we've come a long way. In fact every directive I gave in that declaration has been completed:

- New reporting and information-sharing procedures are now codified in policy and rule.
- Almost 1,000 law enforcement officers statewide have been trained to provide naloxone. We have also seen a 355 percent increase in the number of naloxone doses dispensed by pharmacists to communities.
- Our health care institutions now have rules for opioid prescribing and treatment.
- Arizona Opioid Prescribing Guidelines have been updated and distributed.
- Our comprehensive Arizona Opioid Epidemic Act went into effect on April 26th.
- And the 12 recommendations of our Opioid Action Plan will be fully implemented by the end of June.

With these items completed, our Emergency Declaration has served its purpose.

And that's not all the positive news we have to report:

- March and April of 2018 saw a 33 percent reduction in the number of opioid prescriptions statewide compared to March and April of 2017.
- Since last June, we have seen a 38 percent increase in the number of people referred to behavioral health treatment from hospitals after an overdose.
- Since July of 2017, we have seen a 60 percent reduction in the number of patients potentially doctor shopping through our CSPMP threshold report.
- And since this April, over 200 prescribers have utilized our newly established Opioid Assistance and Referral Line to get expert advice on treating patients.
- In addition, we have worked with 100 percent of Arizona academic partners who train prescribers to develop a statewide curriculum on opioid prescribing, treatment of opioid use disorder, and management of chronic pain. This could be implemented in our schools as early as this coming fall.

We have certainly made progress, but we know that this fight remains deadly and that it is far from over. Continuing to work with each other, and across the aisle as we have done, I know this is a fight we can win.

Thank you again for having me today.