

I appreciate the opportunity to speak on this epidemic of the Opioid Crisis, and I appreciate the efforts of everyone here. To fight this public health crisis, we must work together. I pledge to do whatever I can to assist in that effort, because Utah is being hit especially hard by opioid abuse and death.

I am humbled by the raw fact and statistics regarding this in my state:

-The Utah Department of Health says that 24 individuals die from prescription opioid overdoses every month in Utah. A growing number of people are dying from heroin overdoses.

-The rate of these deaths has exploded over the last 10 years. I would say it's out of control. The National Institute on Drug Abuse reports that there are more than 60,000 deaths per year in our country from prescription and heroin use. Utah is in the top five for those types of death per capita.

I don't like to see anyone suffer and die from the miserable cycle of drug dependency and abuse.

And here's what hits me the hardest: Innocent children are being affected by this epidemic.

In too many cases, parents are no longer parents, they're drug addicts. Their children are doing the parenting themselves, and for their brothers and sisters.

I recently learned of a case in Elk Ridge, Utah, which is just minutes from my home.

There, a boy in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade told the story of life with his mom and stepdad: Waking up by himself, making breakfast and dinner for his 2 year old brother and newborn sister. About missing the bus, with no one to take him to school. Of his brother crying because his mom and dad weren't there.

Mom and dad were on heroin: That's why they weren't there.

And that's not the end of the story.

That boy's sister--the newborn baby--was born addicted to opioids, because her mother was using while she was pregnant. After she was born, to hide the baby's withdrawal symptoms from the hospital staff, the parents rubbed crushed opioids on the child's gums.

The parents are now in jail--arrested trying to return stolen merchandise for money at the local Wal-Mart. And for child abuse and neglect.

Those kids are just an example of the toll this epidemic is taking.

But there are those in my state that are taking steps to deal with it. Utah's Intermountain Healthcare has set a goal to reduce opioid prescribing by 40 per cent in its 22 hospitals and 180 clinics by the end of next year.

I applaud this effort, but it's obviously just one piece of a larger puzzle.

We need to put those pieces together for our children, for ourselves, and for the future of the United States of America.

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