

Opening Statement of Chairman Greg Walden
Subcommittee on Health
“Member Day: Testimony and Proposals on the Opioid Crisis”
October 11, 2017

It’s great to see so much activity in our hearing room today. While there are a lot of familiar faces, there are plenty that we don’t see in here on a regular basis. For those folks, I’d like to say welcome to Energy and Commerce. I’m glad you could join us for this important opportunity to highlight the opioid crisis.

The heartbreaking epidemic has been featured on the front pages of our local newspapers, on national television, and as part of stories from our friends and family members. And with good reason – conservative estimates forecast more than 90 Americans die from opioid overdoses each day, while more than 1,000 are treated each day for abusing opioids. In 2016 alone, more than 64,000 Americans died from drug overdoses, and in Oregon alone, more people died last year from drug overdoses than from car accidents.

I recently held roundtables in southern and central Oregon to discuss how we can better combat the crisis. Meeting with the people on the front lines of this fight in our communities to find out what is working, and what more can be done, is crucial to our efforts to end this scourge.

The Energy and Commerce Committee has led a number of bipartisan initiatives to help address the opioid epidemic. From groundbreaking initiatives that are now law, like the *Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery*

Act (CARA) and the *21st Century Cures Act*, resources are becoming available and important policy changes are being implemented to stem the tide of opioids.

CARA established a comprehensive strategy for improving evidence-based treatment for patients with substance-use disorders and made significant changes to expand access to addiction treatment services and overdose reversal medications. The new law also included criminal justice and law enforcement-related provisions.

The *21st Century Cures Act* provided \$1 billion in grants for states, the first half of which was made available in April 2017, to be administered by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Oregon received \$6.5 million in grants to help combat the epidemic that has plagued our great state.

However, more work needs to be done.

Since the passage of *CARA* and *the 21st Century Cures Act*, other issues have emerged in the fight against opioids, such as the proliferation of fentanyl and its analogues, allegations of pill dumping, and the practice of patient brokering.

In my own district, I've heard the all too familiar tale of the mother whose oldest son was first prescribed opioids after injuring his ankle playing basketball. It didn't take long for him to become addicted.

Another parent shared with me the story of his sister, a nurse, who died of an overdose after years of suffering from addiction and bouncing between pharmacies passing off forged prescriptions. He spoke about how better tracking and treatment could have helped catch his sister's problem earlier and perhaps made counseling more effective. As it was, she was only caught because two pharmacies in a small town happened to check with each other. You see, by then it was too late.

Those two stories may have come from Oregon, but they're not exclusive to my home state. And they're why we're here today.

Addressing the opioid epidemic requires an all-hands-on-deck effort. Today we will be hearing testimony and stories from our colleagues both on and off the Energy & Commerce Committee about what more can be done. I'm looking forward to hearing feedback and input from both sides of the aisle – to hear about what's working and what's not, find ways to complement existing law, and to address emerging issues.

I appreciate everyone here with us today taking the time to participate, and I look forward to hearing from my colleagues on both side of the aisle. Together, we must continue to fight to combat the opioid crisis.