

**Opening Statement of Chairman Ron Johnson:
“America’s Heroin Epidemic at the Border: Local, State, and Federal Law Enforcement
Efforts to Combat Illicit Narcotic Trafficking”**

Monday, November 23, 2015

As submitted for the record:

This Congress, the committee has spent a great deal of time uncovering and defining the problems occurring at our borders. Today will mark the 13th hearing focused on border security and our second hearing highlighting the rising heroin epidemic across this country. These topics are closely related, as one root cause of our unsecure border is America’s insatiable demand for drugs.

The accumulated testimony and information that forms the committee’s record indicates that America’s borders are not secure. One key indicator is the fact that we are interdicting only 5 to 10 percent of illegal drugs crossing our southwest border. The declining price of heroin—from a nationwide average of \$3,260 per gram of pure heroin in 1981 to \$465 in 2012—is a metric that proves the point.

Today, the committee will explore how our unsecure Arizona-Mexico border has become a gateway for drug traffickers to distribute illicit drugs across the country. I want to thank Senator McCain, a trusted and valuable member of the committee, for proposing and organizing this very important hearing, and Senator Flake, for also joining us to discuss this topic.

Arizona is facing a heroin epidemic, with 180 deaths attributed to heroin in 2014, up from 125 in 2013 and 90 in 2012. Overall, heroin treatment admissions to publicly funded facilities in Arizona increased approximately 77 percent, from 1,625 in 2008 to 2,880 in 2012.

The Midwest also has been greatly affected by this epidemic. Recently the Wisconsin Department of Health Services reported that drug overdoses killed more Wisconsin residents in 2013 than did motor vehicle crashes, breast cancer or suicide. Between 2008 and 2012, heroin overdose deaths in Wisconsin tripled. While Wisconsin averaged only 29 heroin deaths from 2000 to 2007, by 2014 more than 200 heroin-related deaths occurred in Wisconsin. In Milwaukee County alone, 119 heroin-related deaths occurred in 2014. In fact, earlier this month, it was reported that six people died in Milwaukee in one 24-hour period due to prescription medication or heroin overdoses. Nationwide, the U.S. saw more than 8,000 deaths related to heroin in 2013.

Largely, this heroin entered the U.S. through the Arizona-Mexico border via Mexican cartels, was trafficked to Chicago by drug trafficking organizations (DTOs), and then was distributed throughout communities in Wisconsin by criminal gangs. At the committee’s field hearing in New Hampshire, the Drug Enforcement Agency emphasized this point, testifying that “the growing relationship between Mexican-based drug cartels and domestic street gangs, coupled with ... an unlimited supply of illegal guns, has really created the perfect storm for law enforcement.”

Mexican cartels appear to be responding to the increased demand for heroin in the U.S., and heroin is transiting the border in greater volumes and in larger shipments. Until we take border security seriously in this country, heroin will continue to enter the supply chain through our southwest border to be distributed across all 50 states.

Today, the committee will hear very important federal, state and local perspectives explaining how heroin is trafficked across the Arizona-Mexico border and what effect that has on the local community. I thank the witnesses for appearing today, and I look forward to your testimony.