

**Opening Statement of Senator Tammy Baldwin**  
**Border Security and America's Heroin Epidemic: The Impact of Trafficking and Abuse of Heroin**  
**and Prescription Opioids in Wisconsin**  
**April 15, 2016**

Thank you, Chairman Johnson, and thank you to all of the witnesses for being here today. Each of you are on the front lines of Wisconsin's heroin and opioid abuse crisis. For many, this issue has directly touched your family – so I look forward to hearing from you on how we can improve the health and safety of our communities.

Heroin use and the abuse of opioid painkillers in the U.S. has now reached epidemic levels. In 2014, 28,000 people died from opioids, including heroin, which is tragically a new record high. Today we are facing the grim fact that more Americans die every year from drug overdoses than they do in motor vehicle crashes.

Particularly troubling in Wisconsin is a surge in deaths tied to Fentanyl, a potent painkiller 50 times more powerful than heroin. According to a recent report from the Milwaukee County medical examiner's office, Fentanyl killed 30 people in 2015 – an increase of 500% from 2012.

But Milwaukee County is not alone in facing this crisis. Communities across Wisconsin struggle with this epidemic every day. I recently heard from Leonard, from Colfax, Wisconsin, whose grandson, Nathan, was killed in a car accident when he was just 16 years old. The driver of the other car was under the influence of heroin at the time.

I have also heard from a mother from South Milwaukee, whose son suffered from addiction for 20 years. While he is now in recovery, at one point, she found him unconscious from a heroin overdose on their bathroom floor. And, another mother from Mukwonago wrote to tell me how her son's life was saved by paramedics who administered naloxone during his overdose.

We are now in the midst of a public health emergency and we have a responsibility to guarantee that our communities and families have the resources they need to fight this.

I am proud that Wisconsin has already made progress in addressing this crisis. State leaders, led by State Representative Nygren as well as Senator Erpenbach – who we'll hear from today – have already advanced several measures to help prevent opioid abuse and improve access to mental health services. And, our medical provider community is leading the country in improving safe opioid prescribing education.

But, this crisis requires both our state *and our federal leaders* to step up and take action. That is why I have championed several important reforms in Congress to fight opioid and heroin abuse.

I recently introduced the Heroin and Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention and Reduction Act with my colleague Senator Brown of Ohio. This bill outlines a comprehensive approach to tackle the epidemic in four key areas: prevention, crisis, treatment, and recovery. This bill would:

- improve access to lifesaving opioid reversal drugs, like naloxone;
- expand access to medication-assisted treatments; and
- provide for greater treatment and recovery services for our hardest hit communities, like adolescents.

I was pleased that several of these provisions passed the Senate HELP Committee last month.

As we've seen from the tragic events at the Tomah VA facility here in Wisconsin, opioids and addiction have hit our veterans extremely hard. In the Senate, I have authored bipartisan legislation - named in honor of Marine veteran Jason Simcakoski - that would provide safer and more effective pain management services to our nation's veterans.

My bill would require stronger opioid prescribing guidelines for VA providers, give veterans and their families a stronger voice in patient care and hold the VA system accountable for providing appropriate, quality care. This bill recently passed out of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, and I will continue to fight to see that it is enacted into law.

However, our efforts to combat this epidemic will only be effective if we have a federal commitment to invest resources in our state and local communities. I have been proud to support bipartisan legislation that would supply emergency funding for prevention, treatment and recovery efforts. Unfortunately, this legislation has stalled in Washington because not enough Republicans joined Democrats to support this investment. It is my hope that today's discussion can send a strong message that more must be done.

In addition, as a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, I will continue to champion increased funding for programs to take on this epidemic, including the funding requested by President Obama.

The impact of opioid and heroin abuse knows no political party. Nor is it a problem that either law enforcement or the health care system can tackle alone. The federal government can't solve this problem by itself, just as we can't expect states or local communities to address it alone. It is an issue that unites us all and we need to work as partners.

So, I look forward to learning more about how we can help our Wisconsin communities recover and stay healthy, and how we can work together to tackle a big problem with bold solutions. Thank you.