

**Chairman Johnson Opening Statement:
“America’s Insatiable Demand for Drugs”**

Wednesday, April 13, 2016

As submitted for the record:

Over the last 15 months, this committee has spent a great deal of time studying and describing the realities of American border security. The accumulated testimony on the committee’s record indicates that America’s borders are not secure. It is my conclusion that, among many causes, the root cause of our insecure border is America’s insatiable demand for drugs. Today’s hearing will further explore this topic.

Drug trafficking is a big business. Mexican transnational criminal organizations, which represent the greatest criminal drug threat in the U.S., generate somewhere between \$19 billion and \$29 billion per year in U.S. drug sales. This is enough to motivate the cartels to find a way, any way, to penetrate our borders. Where fences exist, the cartels dig tunnels under them or fly ultralight aircraft over them. Where there is desert, backpackers carry loads across the border, endangering homes in rural areas along the way. For the most part, the cartels simply drive across the border through legal ports of entry, creatively concealing drugs in tires, batteries, or even jalapeño jars.

Once these drugs cross the border, they are sent to distribution hubs in places such as Phoenix or Chicago. From there, the drugs are disseminated by street gangs into local communities throughout America. No community is left untouched by this sophisticated and fully integrated network. The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) testified at our field hearing in New Hampshire last year that “the new face of organized crime in America” is “[t]he growing relationship between Mexican-based drug cartels and domestic street gangs.”

We spend approximately \$25 billion per year on our “war on drugs.” According to testimony before this committee, we interdict less than 10 percent of illegal drugs coming across our southwest border and somewhere between 11 and 18 percent coming in through our maritime borders. We are losing this war, and the low price of heroin combined with the growing number of heroin overdoses in every corner of America is evidence of that fact.

It is time to seriously reassess our strategies regarding America’s insatiable demand for drugs, our war on drugs, and the lack of border security that is one result.

One final note: Last year, when I traveled to Central America with members of this committee, we had the opportunity to visit a shelter for little girls. This home, attempting to stay hidden without an address in Guatemala City, is protecting girls who have been the victims of sexual abuse and sex trafficking—often at the hands of the drug cartels. Central American societies have been ravaged by what too many Americans consider a “victimless” crime, drug abuse. We have seen the victims, and it is high time that we commit ourselves to finding real solutions.

I thank all of our witnesses for appearing today, and I look forward to your testimony.