

Chairman Johnson Opening Statement
“America’s Insatiable Demand for Drugs: Assessing the Federal Response”

Tuesday, May 17, 2016

As submitted for the record:

As chairman of this committee, I have made addressing border security a top priority. We have held 18 hearings on the topic and released a 100-page report, “The State of America’s Border Security.” The clear finding is that America’s borders are not secure. Over the course of the committee’s extensive work on this issue, it also has become clear that America’s insatiable demand for drugs is the root cause of our insecure border. Today, we will examine the federal government’s response to this demand.

At the federal level, we spend approximately \$31 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.

As a result, heroin entering the United States today is significantly higher in purity and lower in price than it was in the past. According to Wisconsin Attorney General Brad Schimel, heroin sold on the street has increased from five percent in purity to now between 20 and 80 percent. Meanwhile, the price of heroin has decreased from a nationwide average of \$3,260 per gram of pure heroin in 1981 to \$100 to \$150 per gram in Wisconsin today. That can translate into as little as \$10 for one hit.

The ease with which an addict can access heroin has led to an alarming rise in overdoses across the country. In Milwaukee County alone, 109 heroin-related overdose deaths were reported in 2015. In 2014, there were more than 47,000 drug overdoses in the United States, meaning that every day an average of 129 Americans die of overdose. One of those senseless losses was Lauri Badura’s son, Archie. During a field hearing in Wisconsin last month, I had the opportunity to meet with Lauri and learn about her son and his tragic death from a heroin overdose. During her courageous testimony, she stated that she did not understand the lack of outrage and attention being paid to this killer.

We are not winning the war on drugs. I share Lauri Badura’s frustration that we are not effectively addressing this problem, and I believe we owe it to our nation’s families to reassess our current strategies. To that end, today’s hearing will examine how the United States is allocating funds to fight the war on drugs. In particular, we will explore how resources are currently directed, what is working, and what should be done differently.

I thank our witnesses for providing the attention to this issue that it deserves and I look forward to your testimony.