

Chairman Johnson Opening Statement
“Border Security and America’s Heroin Epidemic: The Impact of the Trafficking and Abuse of Heroin and Prescription Opioids in Wisconsin.”

Friday, April 15, 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 related to American border security. Today will mark the 16th hearing focused on border security and our third hearing highlighting the rising heroin epidemic across this country. These topics are closely related, as it is my belief that the primary 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 of our insecure border is the fact that, according to testimony before this committee, we interdict less than 10 percent of illegal drugs coming across our southwest border and somewhere between 11-18 percent coming in through our maritime borders. The declining price of heroin—from a nationwide average of \$3,260 per gram of pure heroin in 1981 to \$100 per gram on the streets of Milwaukee today—is a metric that proves the point.

In Wisconsin, this translates to one “hit” of heroin costing anywhere from \$10 to \$12 in Milwaukee and \$18 to \$20 in Green Bay. These low prices and the relative ease of access have had devastating effects in the state. While Wisconsin averaged only 27 heroin deaths from 2000 to 2007, by 2014 more than 250 heroin-related deaths occurred in Wisconsin. In Milwaukee County alone, 109 heroin-related deaths occurred in 2015. In fact, last November, it was reported that six people died in Milwaukee in a 24-hour period due to prescription medication or heroin overdoses.

Mexican transnational criminal organizations, which represent the greatest criminal drug threat in the U.S., generate \$19-\$29 billion per year in U.S. drug sales. A kilogram of heroin costs around \$5,000 to produce in Mexico and can be sold to U.S. dealers for as much as \$80,000. This is enough to motivate the cartels to find a way, any way, to penetrate our borders. Once these drugs cross the border, they are sent to distribution hubs in such places as Phoenix, Arizona, or Chicago, Illinois. From there, street gangs further disseminate the drugs into local communities throughout America. In Wisconsin, Milwaukee-based traffickers often travel several times a week to bring in 100-150 gram quantities of heroin from Chicago.

In order to address the heroin and opioid epidemic, we must secure our borders. If our borders remain porous, as they are today, supply will continue to increase, prices will continue to fall, and Wisconsinites will continue to use these deadly narcotics that destroy the lives of not only those who use the drug, but also their family members and loved ones.

Today, Attorney General Schimel, Senator Erbenbach, and Representative Nygren will explain what is being done at the state level to address root causes. The Wisconsin legislature has

unanimously passed 17 bills as part of the Heroin Opiate Prevention and Education (HOPE) Agenda, 16 of which have been signed into law. At a federal level, I was happy to support the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act to battle the opioid epidemic in March and earlier this month I introduced legislation to reduce the pressure doctors currently face that may lead to overprescribing painkillers. These bills will go a long way in addressing our public health crisis, but until we increase the security at our borders, the problem will persist.

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