

**Opening Statement of Chairman Walden
Energy and Commerce Committee
Hearing on “Federal Efforts to Combat the Opioid Crisis: A Status
Update on CARA and Other Initiatives”
October 25, 2017**

(As prepared for delivery)

Each day, more than 1,000 people are treated in emergency departments for misusing prescription opioids.

Each day, 91 Americans die from an opioid overdose.

In last year alone, opioid overdoses have claimed the lives of more Americans than the entire Vietnam War.

In my home state of Oregon, more people died last year from drug overdoses than from car accidents. We hear these statistics over and over again. At roundtables throughout my district – most recently in Grants Pass, in southern Oregon, and Bend, in central Oregon – I’ve heard the stories of Oregonians who put names and faces to these data points.

Addiction and overdoses are happening at alarming rates in every single community. Scan the headlines on any given day and you’ll hear about a life destroyed by addiction or about a raid that seized obscene quantities of prescription painkillers or illicit drugs.

The United States is in the midst of a crisis that has become a national emergency. The number of individuals dying from opioid overdoses has reached epidemic proportions. And even more individuals with substance use disorders have become estranged from their families, unable to work, or living as shells of their former selves because of their addiction. It’s heartbreaking.

To respond to this growing epidemic, the Energy & Commerce Committee has held countless conversations and numerous hearings with experts, stakeholders, law enforcement, individuals in recovery, and family members of opioid abuse victims in order to improve the prevention and treatment of addiction.

From the earliest hearings before our Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee to legislative solutions tested in our Health Subcommittee, our multi-year, multi-Congress findings have led to bills that are now law – namely the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (CARA) and the 21st Century Cures Act.

This year, this committee has initiated multiple, bipartisan investigations into allegations of pill dumping in West Virginia and patient brokering schemes. We have held hearings on the growing threat of fentanyl, innovative ideas in the states, and heard directly from more than 50 members – both on and off this committee – just two weeks ago. But more work needs to be done and we must redouble our efforts to combat the growing crisis.

The primary purpose of this hearing is to hear from the federal agencies charged with implementing the provisions of CARA and the 21st Century Cures Act.

But it also allows this committee to have an important conversation with the DEA.

First, to discuss recent news reports that suggested a bipartisan bill passed through this committee and signed into law by President Obama has negatively impacted DEA's ability to combat the opioid crisis.

Second, we are also looking for some long overdue answers to basic questions and requests for data that this committee has made to the DEA related to our ongoing investigation into alleged pill dumping in the state of West Virginia.

I'm going to be very blunt: my patience is wearing thin. Our requests for data from the DEA are met with delay, excuses and, frankly, inadequate response. People are dying. Lives and families are ruined.

It is time for DEA to get this committee the information we need, and to do it quickly. No more dodges. No more delays. We look forward to finally hearing directly from DEA on these matters.

In addition to the DEA, we will be hearing testimony from officials at the Food and Drug Administration, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the National Institute on Drug Abuse at the National Institutes of Health.

It is our hope that today's testimony will allow us all to learn more about the federal government's shared efforts to address this crisis, allowing us the

opportunity to drill deeper to learn about what's working and what's not working. We'll also have an opportunity to discuss how we can better prevent lawful prescription use from spiraling into abuse; and most importantly, we will discuss what more we can do to reduce overdoses and save lives.

To the witnesses before us today—consider this another call to action. We need your help as we pursue both our investigative work and our legislative work. It is imperative we confront this problem from every side. And it is crucial that everyone remembers we are on the same team.

This crisis requires an “all hands on deck” effort.

We all want to end this scourge. But we must be willing to work together. From the most basic requests for data to crafting and implementing laws, the lines of communication need to be open. If there are changes we need to make in the law, tell us. We have a duty to our constituents and the American people to combat the epidemic from all angles – everyone has a stake in this fight.