

Opening Statement of Chairman Greg Walden
Subcommittee on Digital Commerce and Consumer Protection
“Examining Drug-Impaired Driving”
July 11, 2018

(As prepared for delivery)

Good morning and thank you to our witnesses for appearing before us today to participate in our hearing on drug-impaired driving.

Sadly, we have all known too many lives cut short because of the reckless decision of some to get behind the wheel impaired. About 1 in 4 traffic fatalities each year, that’s roughly 10,000 lives lost, involves an alcohol-impaired driver. Part of the problem for those trying to detect and prevent drug-impaired driving is the lack of statistics available. Even with all of the advances in vehicle safety and crash avoidance systems in recent years, they are not enough to stop the fatal consequences of driving while impaired, whether by alcohol, marijuana, opioids, or a deadly combination.

According to one recent study by the Governors Highway Safety Association, in 2016, about 20 percent of fatally-injured drivers who had drugs in their system tested positive for opioids. Compared to 17% in 2006, we’re seeing a stark trend here with the presence of opioids in fatally-injured drivers on the rise over the past decade.

The Energy and Commerce Committee is all too familiar with the lethal effects of the opioid crisis, and drug-impaired driving is yet another facet of combating this national scourge. More than 50 bills from this committee were included in H.R. 6, the SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Act to address various aspects of this crisis, including prevention, treatment, and support both for the those battling addiction, as well as their families. This is a crisis we have been working to combat over multiple Congresses, and we will continue our efforts until we stem the tide.

Drug-impaired driving creates unique challenges for law enforcement. Whereas nearly every law enforcement agency in America has the resources to test for driving under the influence of alcohol, similar resources are often lacking when it comes to illegal narcotics. The lack of scientifically confirmable evidence of drug-impaired driving can make it difficult for law enforcement officers and prosecutors to keep impaired drivers off of our roads. However, statistics provided by the

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) make it clear that this danger is on the rise.

Today, I look forward to hearing from you, our witnesses, about what Congress can and should be doing to help those on the front lines detect and prevent drugged driving. I know your expertise will provide this committee a better understanding of the size and scope of the problem, as well as the obstacles to better detecting impaired drivers.

I also want to mention that this month marks the one-year anniversary of when this committee unanimously passed the SELF DRIVE Act, providing the first federal framework to ensure the safe and innovative testing, development, and deployment of self-driving cars. Getting safe self-driving cars on the road would go a long way to preventing the deaths of more than 100 Americans who die every day behind the wheel.

But until that day, we must do everything we can to prevent senseless and avoidable tragedies caused by drug-impaired driving. Thank you, and I yield back.