

Patrick Testin: Fighting back against the opiate crisis

Posted on Tuesday, Nov 7, 2017

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One phone call – that’s all it takes to give opiate abuse a name and a face. I still remember the shock I felt when I got the call from my dad and he told me that a friend of mine – someone I’d grown up with, gone to school with, and played football with – was arrested for possession. In my friend’s case, he’s had to lose some of his freedom – many more have lost their lives.

Unfortunately, I’m sure that almost everyone reading this could tell a similar story. We all have friends, co-workers, or relatives that have ended up in jail, in the hospital, or worse – because of opiate abuse. It’s a problem that can’t be ignored – and it’s hitting small town America hard.

That’s why I and other members of the Wisconsin legislature are bringing this issue out of the shadows and fighting back. Through the HOPE Agenda – a package of bills – we’re giving law enforcement more tools to catch and punish drug dealers, providing more accessible treatment for users, and working closely with the medical community to ensure the proper usage of opiates and to provide better emergency care for overdose victims. Rep. John Nygren (Marinette), whose family has been deeply affected by opioid abuse, has led this fight, and I’m proud to stand with him.

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Last week, Governor Walker signed into law my contribution to the HOPE Agenda – Assembly Bill 335 (AB 335), a bill that I wrote with Rep. Joel Kleefisch (Oconomowoc) that cracks down on the distribution of fentanyl analogs. Fentanyl is a prescription painkiller and a schedule 1 controlled substance. It is fifty times

stronger than heroin, and is one of the main reasons that opiate overdose deaths are on the rise. If a drug dealer is caught selling it, he will do time. Unfortunately, some drug dealers have tried to evade prosecution by tweaking the chemical makeup of fentanyl, creating what is known as an analog. Before the passage of AB 335, dealers could sell these dangerous analogs, and law enforcement was limited in what they could do to prosecute them. Our bill gives law enforcement the tools they need to get these drugs and their pushers off the streets by making the letter of our law match its intent. In this fight, we can't afford technicalities.

I'm thankful for this bill's passage, as well as the success of many pieces of the HOPE Agenda. Legislation alone, however, is not enough to solve the opiate epidemic. Awareness and action at the community level is crucial. Learn the signs of opiate addiction at www.addictioncenter.com/opiates/symptoms-signs/. Your knowledge may help save a life.

— *Testin, R-Stevens Point, represents the 24th Senate District.*