

Rep. Grothman: Questions Secretary Azar on opioid abuse

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(Washington, D.C.) – Congressman Glenn Grothman (R-Glenbeulah) today questioned U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Alex Azar about the opioid abuse epidemic in America and the best ways to combat it. In his answers, Secretary Azar proposed several solutions found in Congressman Grothman’s bills aimed at fighting the opioid abuse epidemic; [The Responsible Opioid Prescription Act](#) and [The Improving the Federal Response to Families Impacted by Substance Use Disorder Act](#).

Excerpts of Grothman’s questioning

Congressman Grothman: “I wanted to comment a little bit on the Medicaid program. The seven states in 2015 with the highest rates of opioid related overdoses: West Virginia, New Hampshire, Kentucky, Ohio, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania and Massachusetts, all expanded Medicaid programs under Obamacare. Obviously you get cause and effect all mixed up here as to what’s coming first, but way disproportionately people on Medicaid are far more likely to die of opioid overdose than people who are not on the program. Could you comment on that and is there anything we can do? Do you feel that Medicaid expansion made the opioid situation worse, and is there anything we can do, again remembering that it’s hard to tell in these things what’s the cause and what’s the effect, but can we do anything on the Medicaid program to cut off the supply here?”

Secretary Azar: *“So, the ready availability of cheap, accessible, legal opioids, especially generic ones, was fundamental to this problem. The majority of people*

who get addicted on opioids start from a legal prescription for opioids. Making the financing and accessibility of those readier obviously contributes to it. How much, I can't say, but it's quite clear that would be connected. What we've got to do is get at the issues at the state and federal level of how often people are prescribed, why they are prescribed, and how many they are prescribed with Medicaid. That's why we're asking for prescription drug monitoring programs as well as interoperable across state lines so you can't shop from West Virginia into Ohio for instance and go 'doc. shopping'. We're enforcing against pill mills from our Inspector General's office and the Department of Justice so it's a very serious issue, you raise the right questions."

Grothman: "One final question, overall, prescription drug use in this country is way higher than any other industrialized nation and obviously very expensive. I wonder if you would comment on that in general, your opinion on the amount of prescription drugs prescribed in this country."

Azar: *"Too expensive. But I would say a lot of the major innovation we've had in health care delivery, if you ask doctors, is from the availability to new therapies, not necessarily new procedures, and so we actually need more reform on that other side but we're paying too much absolutely for our drugs."*

Background

Opioid-related deaths have more than quadrupled over the past 20 years as the number of opioids prescribed has increased.

In 2015 alone, more than 50,000 Americans died as a result of heroin and prescription drug overdose.

In October 2017, the Trump administration declared the opioid crisis a public health emergency.

To view the full video of Congressman Grothman's questioning, [please click here](#).