

Speaker Ryan: At leadership press conference, Speaker Ryan discusses the House's work to tackle the opioid epidemic

Posted on Wednesday, Jun 13, 2018

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Summary: Today, Speaker Ryan joined Republican Leadership, Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman Greg Walden (R-OR), and several other House members to share stories of people from their districts who have been impacted by opioid addiction. As the House considers more than 50 bills to combat the opioid epidemic from all sides, Speaker Ryan spoke about a Wisconsin mother who is spreading hope to families facing the trials of addiction.

Opening Statement:

"You've heard some stories here today. Let me give you a number: 115. 115 lives lost every day in America.

"Addiction can feel all-consuming. It can seem impossible to live out your true purpose. But it does not lower the inherent value of a human life.

"Every life has meaning, and no drug can take that away.

"All of us can offer our compassion to one another so that people struggling feel that they have a place to turn.

"That is also something we're tackling here today. Look—this is Michelle Jaskulski. It's a really good Wisconsin name.

"This is Michelle and one of her sons. She's got two sons. Former high school

athletes. Yet, as the case is so often, they became addicted to prescription painkillers, from injuries, and then, later, heroin.

“They are alive, they are clean now. But it was a long road there, and Michelle still worries—as you all know, sobriety is—it’s very fragile.

“Friends and relatives facing addiction, they don’t fully recover, it takes a long time.

“The one thing that strikes me about how she describes dealing with her sons’ addiction: It’s the pervasive loneliness.

“She says that she felt like no one else was dealing with her same struggle. She felt disconnected from her friends, she felt disconnected from her parents, from her faith.

“It goes to show that this can be such an isolating battle. Not just as one struggling with drug use, but for those trying to figure out how they can be there for their loved ones. Mothers taking care of their sons.

“But there is hope that came out of Michelle’s family’s struggle.

“Michelle has made it her mission to help families like hers get through the wilderness of drug addiction and the difficult road to recovery. She has been a tireless advocate for more resources to prevent and treat addiction.

“Congress has heard that call, too. We are taking action to tackle this opioid epidemic.

“Among other things, these bills will stem the flow of opioids into our country. They change the way opioids are prescribed and encourage non-opioid treatments. And they crack down on deadly synthetic drugs like fentanyl.

“And then they strengthen resources for prevention and treatment, including establishing more comprehensive recovery centers.

“We’ve learned a whole lot about this problem in a short period of time.

“In fact, the recovery community—the community that Michelle now helps uphold—is one of the most resilient. This is what she is doing now with her life—making sure that other families don’t fall into the trap that hers did.

“We should applaud that model of support. Our institutions should emulate and encourage this kind of fellowship.

“In those overcoming addiction, and in those supporting them, this is where I see America at its strongest.

“People coming together to help each other through these difficult times, getting rid of the isolation, and having a multi-pronged approach to tackle this opioid crisis.

“This is all about restoring hope, it’s about lifting up communities, and it’s about, hopefully, saving lives.”