

Ranking Member Tim Scott (R-S.C.)  
Opening Statement  
Full Committee Hearing  
January 11, 2024 at 10:00 AM

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for each of you being willing to testify before us today. And thank you, Jelly Roll, for the shout out on the FEND Off Fentanyl legislation last night at your concert.

It's so important for Americans to come together around such an important issue: ending the fentanyl crisis that is devastating family after family after family.

I think specifically of Alan Shao in Charleston, South Carolina – a friend of mine who lost his son, Alan Shao II – to fentanyl. The devastation that has ravished the family is immeasurable, and anything that we can do as a body to make common sense reforms, to hold those accountable, and to stop the cash flow that funds fentanyl is absolutely essential that we get it done right now.

And unfortunately, we're here today having another hearing on FEND Off Fentanyl because our friends on the other side of the Capitol, because of the shenanigans at the end of last year, did not get the bill included in legislation that would have made this, I believe, law already.

It is incredibly unfortunate that playing politics is still a game played in Washington, especially on something so important. And I think, as the Chairman just said, he and I probably don't agree on very much, most consistently, but I will say, having 23 of us vote unanimously on this committee, having 68 of us on the same piece of legislation, and not to have a chance to get it done – it's not just frustrating to those of us on this committee, those of us in Congress, it is incredibly frustrating to the people of our country who watch the devastation eat away at their communities.

Congress needs to come together to stop the Mexican Cartels, Chinese chemical suppliers, and money laundering organizations from profiting off the production and trafficking of fentanyl – resulting in the deaths of tens of thousands of Americans.

Put simply: we should all value the health, safety, and security of Americans.

When I think about the path of destruction fentanyl has carved across the United States, it's truly jaw-dropping. Preliminary CDC data shows that in 2022, 75,000 Americans lost their lives to fentanyl.

In my home state, that's 1,500 South Carolinians in 2022 alone. The national death toll equates to losing the entire city of Wilmington, Delaware, the President's hometown, each year, just from overdoses of fentanyl. And for every life lost, our community feels the impact.

What impact? It's the mothers, brothers, fathers, children who've lost a loved one and who try to pick up the pieces because we have a southern border that is so wide open that 48,000 pounds of fentanyl come right through it.

Fentanyl's destruction has impacted every single one of us personally. I would say that probably half the room knows someone who knows someone whose lives have been devastated and families have been destroyed because of fentanyl.

But let's take a step back and look at how we got to this point over the last several years. Under this current administration, America is facing the worst border crisis in our nation's history, and the president's disastrous policies have turned the fentanyl epidemic into a national crisis.

The CBP reports that fentanyl seizures have soared over 860% since 2019. Our Border Patrol and DEA are working as hard as they can, seizing record amounts of fentanyl at our ports of entry and across our country. But tragically, for every amount seized, we know even more is trafficked on our streets.

That's why we must take a two-prong approach to addressing the fentanyl crisis: Number one, we must tackle the physical front by securing our border. That's why I introduced both the Alan T. Shao II Fentanyl Public Health Emergency and Overdose Prevention Act as well as the Secure the Border Act of 2023. These bills would expedite the processing and removal of migrants illegally entering the country and properly fund and bolster security measures along our southern border.

Number two, we must attack the criminal financing of the fentanyl trade by enforcing our money laundering and sanctions laws. That's where this Banking Committee comes in to play. My bill, the FEND Off Fentanyl Act, which is bipartisan, is critical to helping stop this illicit financing. I'd once again like to thank the chairman – and all of the colleagues on this committee – for working together in a bipartisan fashion for the health of this nation.

FEND makes combating fentanyl a top national security priority for the United States, and once enacted, will maximize our ability to leverage sanctions and anti-money laundering tools against illicit Mexican and Chinese organizations that traffic deadly fentanyl.

“Follow the money” is a tried-and-true investigative strategy that must be employed more forcefully to combat fentanyl trafficking in the United States.

Cartels and criminals that profit from our devastating losses must be stopped. And to do that, we have to hit them where it hurts – and that's their wallets. The illicit money engine needs to be turned off – and it needs to be turned off now.

The FEND off Fentanyl Act makes clear what we all know too well – the fentanyl crisis facing America is a national emergency and must be treated as a national health emergency.

Americans cannot afford for us to wait.

I am grateful we have a panel here today that is willing to share their perspectives, personal stories, and support for our legislation. I look forward to hearing from each witness on this critically important issue.

Thank you.