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COMBATING FENTANYL

THE AMERICA FIRST ACTION PLAN

JULY 2023

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Dear Concerned Citizen,

On June 3, 1839, the Qing dynasty Imperial Commissioner Lin Zexu (林則徐) supervised the destruction of 1,000 long tons of opium at the Guangdong settlement of Humen. The opium, mostly seized from British merchants, was the agent of horrific levels of addiction, suffering, and death among ordinary Chinese people. Commissioner Lin oversaw the process. The opium was dumped into pits, mixed with salt, lime, and water, and covered with dirt. A laborer who tried to steal some of the forbidden substance for himself was executed on the spot.

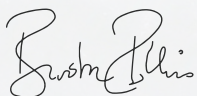
The 19th-century Chinese destruction of British opium was, by any fair estimate, a legitimate and entirely just act of self-defense. A foreign power was bringing an illegal substance, literally the stuff of death, to its people, and the government charged with their stewardship acted decisively to defend them. Of course, history is not a morality play. The European powers responsible for the opium trade, the British foremost among them, declared war on Qing-dynasty China and defeated it soundly.

History does, however, rhyme, an observation that has long since become a trope attributable to no one. If China under the Qing in the 19th century was the victim of foreign powers sending deadly drugs to its people, then China under the Communists in the 21st is itself the very villain that Imperial Commissioner Lin Zexu fought.

The victimized nation today is the United States of America, and the stuff of death is not opium, but fentanyl. The parallels are strong. Fentanyl now, like opium then, saps the energy of a whole nation, sows death and suffering among its communities, and strikes at the lifeblood of a free and democratic society. The parallels are strong, but they also end there because, unlike the decrepit China of the late-Qing era, the United States of this century can effectively defend itself and its people...if it chooses to.

This book shows us the way. It is an America First strategy to fight back against the fentanyl crisis. By getting tough on China, securing our border, creating enhanced penalties, and optimizing public health and education, our country can turn the tide. America still has the potential to rise to any challenge, and this strategy shows how our Nation can meet this moment.

For America First, Always —



Brooke Leslie Rollins
PRESIDENT AND CEO

INTRODUCTION

Today, our Nation is in the midst of a serious public health crisis. Illicit fentanyl has claimed the lives of tens of thousands of Americans, yet there seems to be little consensus regarding the origin of the drug and how it has infiltrated our communities. This book is intended to be the trusted resource for state and federal policymakers to understand the threat of fentanyl and the America First solutions needed to fix this crisis. It is also intended to be a resource to educate all Americans about this dangerous drug and why it is such a threat to our communities.

Organized into two sections, this book first examines the origins of fentanyl and its precursors, which are substances used to make fentanyl that originate mainly in China. The Mexican drug cartels, which are Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs), then manufacture the drug and smuggle it across the U.S. border, which is how it arrives in American communities. Unfortunately, the Biden Administration's border crisis has fueled the ability of the drug cartels to transport fentanyl into the Nation, where it threatens millions of American lives. The administration's changes to border policy and its reluctance to enforce immigration laws are a testament to how such policy decisions can produce deadly consequences that traumatize the lives of parents and loved ones forever.

The next section of this book details the America First action plan to combat fentanyl and safeguard the American people from the horrors of this drug. Our Nation's policymakers have never had a better reason to rise to the challenge of doing what the people elected them to do: protect Americans and serve their interests first. To effectively end this crisis, policymakers must examine how fentanyl arrives in the U.S. and address the overwhelming

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demand for this drug. By refusing to secure our border and tackle the threat of this drug head-on, the Biden Administration's approach ends up serving the interests of China and the Mexican drug cartels. The crisis cannot be solved without first examining the origins of fentanyl and committing to stopping its flow head-on. This is the “root causes” approach that the Biden Administration should be using when addressing this issue. Policymakers must also address the increased potency of fentanyl and the fact that far too many Americans are being poisoned by the deadly drug. Specific initiatives to address this are a key part of the America First approach because we need the next generation of Americans to be healthy and drug-free. We hope you will join us in turning this action plan into a reality.

WHAT IS FENTANYL?

What is fentanyl?

Fentanyl is a powerful synthetic opioid originally intended to be used in medical settings. It is 50 times more potent than heroin and 100 times more potent than morphine. Contraband fentanyl and its precursor chemicals manufactured in China and smuggled across our southern border by the Mexican cartels and are now making headlines for the massive spike in deaths in communities across our Nation.

Where does fentanyl come from?

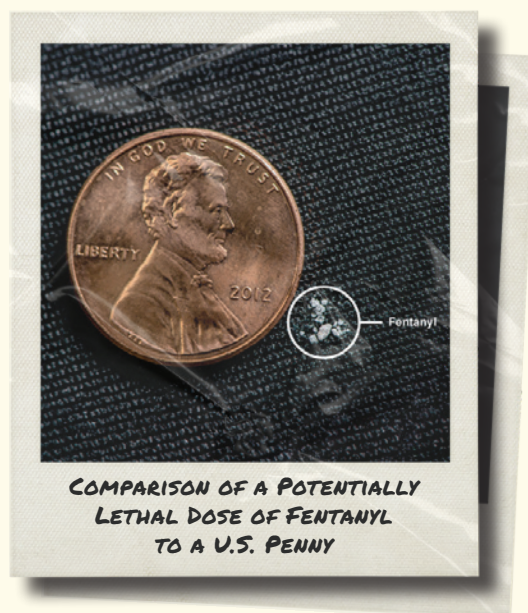
Most of the fentanyl circulating in America is manufactured in China and smuggled in by Mexican cartels across the southern border. A significant amount also enters through U.S. ports of entry via international mail. The current failed border strategy of the Biden Administration generates billions of dollars for the cartels, as they can smuggle drugs and people across the border at record levels.

How is fentanyl falling into the hands of young Americans?

Parents need to be aware that criminal cartels and other bad actors are targeting young Americans, including by offering pills on social media, which are reportedly very easy to obtain. One of the most alarming parts of this epidemic is the brightly colored pills and powder known as rainbow fentanyl. Fentanyl has been found in Legos and candy, likely by drug dealers trying to smuggle pills without detection from law enforcement.

How much fentanyl is a lethal dose?

Fentanyl is the deadliest drug encountered in our Nation's history, and it takes just a small amount for someone to overdose within minutes. A mere 2 milligrams of fentanyl—about the size of the tip of a pencil—is a potentially lethal dose. Despite such a small amount being potentially lethal, drug traffickers package fentanyl by the kilogram, and a single kilogram—about the size of a cantaloupe—has the potential to kill up to 500,000 Americans. The lethal dose is smaller than a U.S. penny.



Source: GOA adaptation of U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration information. | GAO21-499

How are Americans dying from fentanyl?

Almost all deaths attributed to fentanyl are overdoses from illicitly manufactured synthetic fentanyl—not from legal prescription fentanyl. Fentanyl is becoming known as the “silent killer,” as stories of young people unknowingly taking drugs laced with fentanyl are tragically dying. For example, someone may ingest what that person thinks is a “normal” amount of Xanax or heroin but immediately lose consciousness and stop breathing due to the potency of the fentanyl with which it was laced.

How many Americans are dying?

Fentanyl is responsible for more deaths than any other drug, with the rates of death steeply rising over the past few years. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that loss of life linked to fentanyl and similar synthetic opioids surged by over 20% last year, twice the number of meth overdoses. The number of lethal synthetic opioid overdoses (primarily made up by fentanyl) in 2021 was 71,238—surpassing the number of U.S. casualties during the entire Vietnam War. It has been reported that 136 people die every single day from opioid abuse in the U.S. alone.

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There is a staggering amount of deadly fentanyl within our Nation's borders; enough was caught crossing the border in 2021 to kill 2.5 billion people—or every American 7 times over.

How much fentanyl is in our country?

There is a staggering amount of deadly fentanyl within our Nation's borders; enough was caught crossing the border in 2021 to kill 2.5 billion people—or every American 7 times over. In just four months, 10 million pills and nearly one thousand pounds of powdered fentanyl were seized by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) in communities nationwide, which is the equivalent of 36 million deadly doses. Far more fentanyl is believed to have entered our communities undetected by Border Patrol agents.

How can you tell if a drug is synthetic or laced with fentanyl?

You can't. Counterfeit pills can only be identified by a medical professional, and the difference between prescription medication and its deadly counterpart is not obvious enough to the naked eye. An estimated 60% of counterfeit prescription pills may have a potentially lethal dose of fentanyl. Last year, more than 20 million counterfeit prescription pills laced with fentanyl were seized, which is more than during the prior two years combined.

Why is fentanyl used by drug producers?

Fentanyl is more potent than typical street drugs but is also manufactured at a lower cost per dose. This means it is an ideal “cutting agent” that is used to dilute more expensive drugs, which can be sold at the same price. Though purchases of pure fentanyl are rare, drug dealers and distributors easily add it to other drugs, putting unsuspecting users at risk of an overdose. The DEA estimates that 6 in 10 drugs with fentanyl contain a lethal dose.

How can we end the fentanyl crisis?

The fentanyl crisis represents a new wave of the ongoing opioid public health emergency that needs to be combated on the supply side and demand side. On the supply side, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) needs to implement new policies that secure the border and prevent drugs and illegal aliens from entering our country. China needs to be held accountable for its role in manufacturing this deadly drug and allowing it to exit the country. On the demand side, Americans need to understand the dangers of fentanyl and the increasing likelihood that it may be laced with other drugs purchased on the streets.

FENTANYL BY THE NUMBERS

THE POTENTIALLY
LETHAL DOSE
OF FENTANYL
IS ONLY

2 MG

LESS THAN ONE
GRAM OF SUGAR



**SYNTHETIC
OPIOID DEATHS**

LARGELY DRIVEN
BY FENTANYL
SURGED BY
OVER 20% IN 2021



**KILLING OVER
71,000
AMERICANS**

IN BOTH 2021
AND 2022, OVER

109,000

**AMERICANS DIED
FROM DRUG
OVERDOSES**

THIS IS A RECORD IN OUR
NATION'S HISTORY



14,700
**POUNDS OF
FENTANYL**

WAS SEIZED AT OUR
NATION'S PORTS OF
ENTRY IN FY22

**THIS IS
ENOUGH TO
KILL EVERY
AMERICAN 10
TIMES OVER**

FENTANYL'S JOURNEY INTO AMERICAN COMMUNITIES

01 ORIGIN: CHINA

Most fentanyl precursors are
manufactured in clandestine
labs in China; some of them
come from India.

1

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136 PEOPLE DIE FROM OPIOID ABUSE EVERY DAY IN THE U.S.

Fentanyl is Hitting All States both at the Border and Beyond – Here are some Harrowing Figures

Drug overdose deaths in **Montana** have increased 67% over the past five years.

In **Arizona**, 74% of overdose deaths involved at least one opioid.
81% of these deaths had at least one potential opportunity for intervention.

In 2021, 80% of drug overdose deaths in both **West Virginia** and **Ohio** involved illicit fentanyl poisoning.



THE INVESTIGATION

THE INVESTIGATION

CHINA PRECURSORS AND ORGANIZED CRIME

To effectively combat the fentanyl pouring into our country, policymakers must understand how precursor drugs produced in China and organized crime on both sides of the Pacific are contributing to the current crisis. In 2020, DEA data identified China as the origin of the precursors used to produce nearly all fentanyl trafficked into the U.S. The DEA explained that these precursors historically have been illegally shipped directly into the U.S. or through Mexico and Canada, where they are then smuggled across the border. The exportation of fentanyl precursors leads to tens of thousands of American deaths each year, and this issue cannot be ignored.

China's totalitarian government is either complicit in or is turning a blind eye to this activity. These dangerous precursors have become an integral part of China's systematic malign influence upon U.S. citizens and institutions, which also includes economic manipulation, intellectual property theft, and the acquisition of strategic infrastructure and farmland.

In fentanyl, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has found the perfect vehicle. Just a few kilograms of precursor chemicals are enough to supply

millions of doses of fentanyl, which makes border searches difficult when looking through hundreds of thousands of tons of chemicals.

Meanwhile, drug use within China is minimal. Drug dealers in China are subject to the death penalty, and drug users are more likely to receive punishment than treatment. This system echoes the cynical stance of the CCP in the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, when it banned travel from Wuhan to the rest of China but deliberately allowed international flights to leave its country, spreading the disease across the world.

China places perverse incentives on many companies that manufacture fentanyl precursors as part of their business activities by labeling them "New and High Technology Enterprises." Doing so qualifies them for financial rewards so that they pursue innovation and improve China's STEM fields. Companies such as Yuancheng that openly sell fentanyl precursors have received tax breaks and direct financial support for inventing "self-developed products" (Fentanyl Inc., 2019). China's 14th Five-Year Plan calls for its pharmaceutical companies to become "leaders in innovation." Estimates show that rapid growth will cause China's

pharmaceutical industry, including chemical companies that manufacture fentanyl precursors, to become the largest of its kind within 10 years (Daxue, 2020).

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In 2020, DEA data identified China as the origin of the precursors used to produce nearly all fentanyl trafficked into the U.S.

In 2019, as a result of negotiations with the Trump Administration, China designated all forms of fentanyl and analogues to be scheduled, which means they were increasingly controlled and regulated by the government (Greenwood and Fashola, 2021). This action drastically lowered the amount of fentanyl directly shipped from China to those engaged in criminal activity in the U.S. (CRS, 2022). Fentanyl precursors are increasingly shipped from China to Mexico, where the product is synthesized and then smuggled across the border (U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, 2021). As DEA Administrator Anne Milgram noted, “The only limit on how much fentanyl they can make is the amount of precursor chemicals they can get.”

This China-Mexico trade takes place primarily between the Triads, a China-based international organized crime syndicate, and the Mexican Sinaloa and Jalisco cartels (Asher and Puerta, 2022). After fentanyl-laced pills are sold in the U.S., laundered funds are picked up, often by Chinese students in the U.S. on education visas, and sent back to the Triads via the app WeChat and Chinese banks (Fentanyl Inc., 2019).

This massive money-laundering operation by the Chinese Triads begins with a deal for drugs made with Mexican pesos. The Triads will then arrange for a wealthy Chinese citizen to buy the drugs by transferring Chinese currency into the cartels’ accounts. This system is attractive to Chinese nationals because of laws preventing them from moving money out of the country. In the arrangement with the Triads, all the Chinese transactions remain in-country, and the cartels make money by charging 10% interest for the in-demand transaction. The sheer amount of money—perhaps hundreds of millions if not billions of dollars—has led retired Admiral Craig Fuller to speculate that the CCP is “at least tacitly supporting the money laundering” (Pleasance, 2023).

In this way, the CCP provides the first essential link in the supply chain that brings fentanyl to American homes and communities.

THE INVESTIGATION

CARTELS SMUGGLING FENTANYL ACROSS THE SOUTHERN BORDER

The Mexican drug cartels are responsible for facilitating the movement of illicit fentanyl across the border and into American communities. The drug is an attractive pick for the cartels because it is entirely synthetic and more potent than most other illicit narcotics, making it easy and cheaper to produce. The cartels obtain nearly all fentanyl precursors (substances used to make fentanyl) from China through maritime ports in Western Mexico, over which they battle for control (Myers, 2019). The cartels have their “cooks” convert these substances into fentanyl, also lacing it into fake prescription and other illicit drugs. The DEA sums up the process this way:

“Traffickers could typically purchase a kilogram of fentanyl powder for a few thousand dollars from a Chinese supplier, transform it into hundreds of thousands of pills, and sell the counterfeit pills for

millions of dollars in profit. If a particular batch has 2 milligrams of fentanyl per pill, approximately 500,000 counterfeit pills can be manufactured from 1 kilogram of pure fentanyl” (Standaert, 2021).

Recent indictments from the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) implicate a faction of the Sinaloa cartel specifically for a “sophisticated pipeline of fentanyl precursor chemicals from China” and extensive “guns-for-fentanyl deals that involve the smuggling of military-grade weapons from the U.S.” (Mann, 2023). A *Wall Street Journal* investigation revealed how the Sinaloa cooks reportedly make enough fentanyl for “hundreds of thousands of doses” every six days and report profits in the thousands every week—more than the average Mexican makes in a year (Kamp, et. al., 2022). A fentanyl cook for the Sinaloa cartel told PBS that an 11-pound package of fentanyl would sell for \$15,000 in Culiacan, Mexico, but would increase steeply in price to \$100,000 by the time it reached the U.S. (Villamizar, 2021).

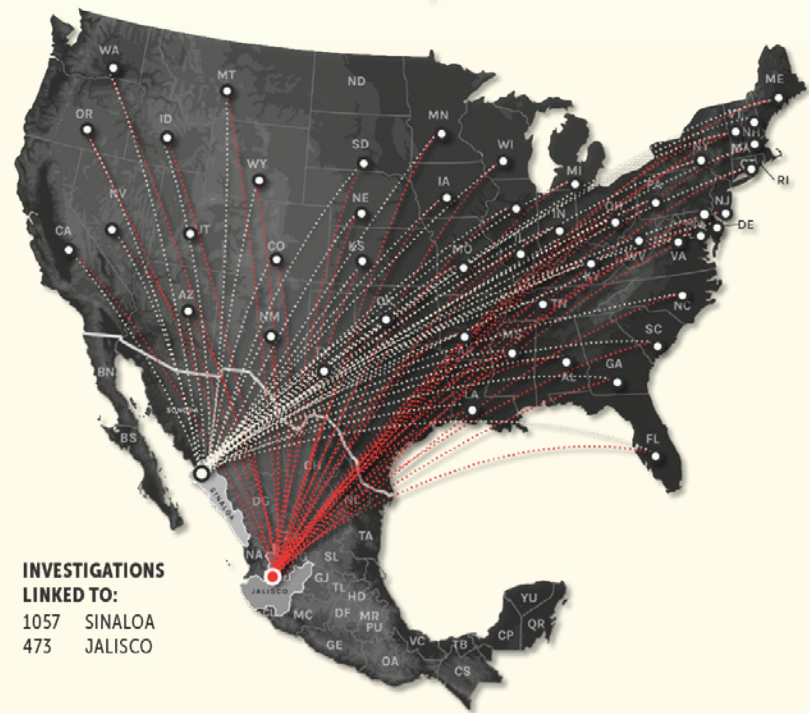
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The cartels use drug mules to transport fentanyl to the border, but some migrants also volunteer to smuggle drugs to reduce their debt from the tax required to move through their territory. This tax, known as the “*piso*,” ranges from \$4,000 to as much as \$20,000 per person, depending on where they are from and the extent of the territory across which they are traveling (Jordan, 2022).

The cartels use drug mules to transport fentanyl to the border, but some migrants also volunteer to smuggle drugs to reduce their debt from the tax required to move through their territory. This tax, known as the “*piso*,” ranges from \$4,000 to as much as \$20,000 per person, depending on where they are from and the extent of the territory across which they are traveling (Jordan, 2022). There are also reports that cartels force illegal aliens to smuggle drugs across the border, threatening those who refuse to do so with death (Burnett, 2011). Though it is nearly impossible to determine exactly how much illicit fentanyl is successfully smuggled across the border, several main indicators point to a spike in successful attempts.

THE REACH OF THE SINALOA AND JALISCO CARTELS INTO THE U.S. INTERIOR

Source: Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA).



First, the surge in illicit fentanyl discovered in the interior of the Nation points to obvious successful smuggling operations. During the DEA's "Operation Last Mile", which comprised nearly 1,500 investigations from May 2022-2023, agents seized 43 million pounds of fentanyl pills and 6,500 pounds of fentanyl powder from Mexican drug cartels. Their seizures amounted to 193 million deadly doses found nationwide.

Second, an increase in illicit drugs interdicted at the southern border represents a likely correlation of a higher number of drugs not interdicted at the southern border. In FY13, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) seized just 2 pounds of fentanyl at the southern border; in FY17, they seized more than 530 pounds. By FY22, that number reached a total of 14,700 pounds in just one year—enough to kill every American 10 times over (CBP, n.d.). The most significant spike in CBP's illicit fentanyl seizures occurred between FY20 and FY21, when they rose 133 percent from 4,800 pounds to 11,200 pounds. In seven months of FY23, total seizures of illicit fentanyl at the southern border have amounted to 17,200 pounds, far surpassing last year's total.

Contrary to the Left's claim that "more fentanyl seizures are a sign of success," greater seizures are a sign that the cartels are more emboldened than ever, as photo and video evidence of cartels and drug mules camouflaged walking across the border proves (C-Span, 2023).

Third, an increase in the number of "gotaways" crossing the southern border—those who successfully crossed over and evaded capture—is a likely indicator of additional fentanyl smuggled into the country. It is well known that cartels employ drug mules to sneak fentanyl across the border. They are particularly strategic in using large caravans of illegal aliens as a diversion to occupy Border Patrol while they smuggle drugs into unguarded areas along the border (Jones, 2021; Giaritelli, 2022). The number of gotaways has increased from 389,000 in FY21 to 600,000 in FY22, to 530,000 in just eight months of FY23, totaling at least 1.5 million known gotaways under the Biden Administration. This is more than three times the number of gotaways in the Trump Administration's final three years (Hauf, 2023).

THE INVESTIGATION: CARTELS SMUGGLING FENTANYL ACROSS THE SOUTHERN BORDER

Fourth, the number of synthetic opioid deaths points to an increase of smuggled fentanyl entering the country and successfully infiltrating American communities. Fentanyl is now the primary cause of death for Americans ages 18-45 and has become known as the “silent killer” because of how it is cut or laced with other drugs and sold to an unaware buyer. In 2021, synthetic opioid deaths (largely driven by fentanyl) surged by more than 20%, killing more than 71,000 Americans. Provisional total drug overdose deaths in the U.S. reached an all-time high of 109,000 in both 2021 and 2022 (McPhillips, 2023).

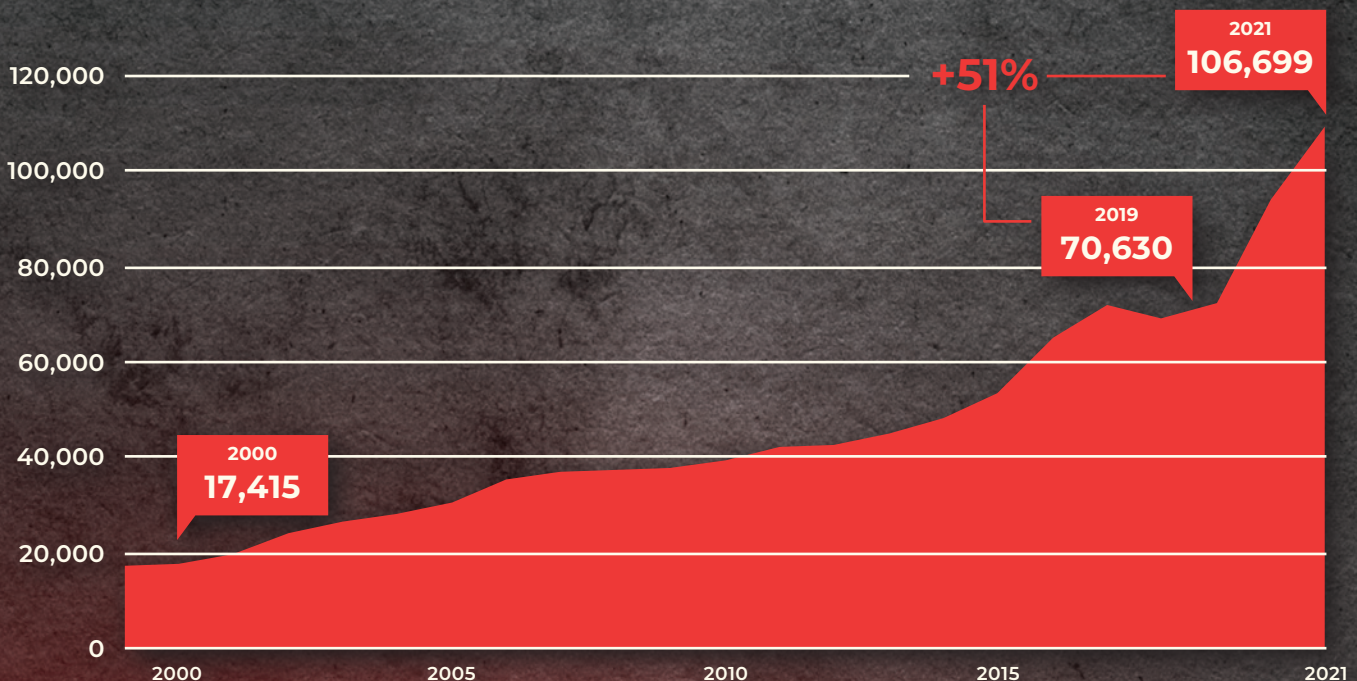
Additionally, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) estimates that 9.5 million Americans abused opioids in 2020—the latest data available from the National Survey of Drug Use and Health (SAMHSA, n.d.).

This data counters the Biden Administration and the claim of those on the Left that “90 percent of fentanyl is seized at ports of entry” (House Judiciary Committee, 2023). The staggering pace of rising opioid deaths indicates that much more fentanyl is coming across the border than the 10% figure. Firsthand sources at the border recently testified before Congress that 48% of fentanyl is being intercepted at ports of entry, and 52% of fentanyl is being intercepted between ports (House Judiciary Committee, 2023).

How the Cartels Intentionally Target Young Americans

One of the most alarming parts of the fentanyl epidemic is the prevalence of brightly colored pills and powder known as “rainbow fentanyl” that has been seized in at least 26 states (DEA, 2022).

NUMBER OF DRUG OVERDOSE DEATHS IN THE UNITED STATES



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Discrepancy in 2021 numbers is due to final vs. provisional reporting. This graph depicts the final number.

These new pills look like candy, and some of the drug traffickers have nicknamed them Sweet Tarts and Skittles. The DEA is reporting that it is not an accident or coincidence, but a deliberate attempt by drug traffickers to lure in young Americans and get them addicted at an early age (Sinnenberg, 2022). Other experts have suggested that the colored pills are meant to resemble real prescriptions from a pharmacy (Mann, 2022). As seen in the photo below, both genuine and fake pills are extremely similar, and could be mistaken by even a regular user.

Recent discoveries of fentanyl stored in Lego boxes and sidewalk chalk appear to be methods used to conceal drugs and avoid law enforcement detection (DEA, 2022). Though there has been no clear evidence indicating drug traffickers are putting pills directly into children's candy, many parents were understandably concerned about the safety of trick-

or-treating this past Halloween (Snow, Ali, 2022). Polling indicates that at least 64% of parents were reportedly concerned someone was lacing their children's candy with fentanyl or other dangerous drugs during the 2022 Halloween season (RMG Research, Inc., 2022).

There is legitimate cause for concern about the overwhelming evidence that cartels and drug dealers are targeting teens through social media. Drug dealers are reportedly using Snapchat in particular to offer party and study drugs (Vicci, 2022). All too often, these are fake pills that have been cut with fentanyl and, therefore, the potency of the dose is higher than expected. The DEA graphic below illustrates some of the emoji codes used for fake prescription drugs, such as the kind that are found being laced with fentanyl.



Source: DEA

THE INVESTIGATION

THE DESTRUCTION OF AMERICAN COMMUNITIES

Although the lifecycle of fentanyl often begins overseas—as precursors used to make fentanyl are developed in China—and winds its way through a labyrinthine maze of cartel manufacturers and distributors, primarily in Mexico, it is nonetheless a decidedly domestic threat (AFPI, 2022). The rise of fentanyl-related overdoses is a recent phenomenon, as this drug was not on law enforcement’s radar a decade ago. In 2018, *Rolling Stone* magazine helped elevate the issue to the national stage, writing that 37% of New York City’s cocaine-related overdose deaths involved fentanyl (Scaccia, 2018). Law enforcement officers in Tennessee subsequently warned communities about marijuana laced with fentanyl. Today, daily overdoses are reported on the news all across the country, and seemingly no town or school appears to be safe. It has been reported that 136 people die every single day from an opioid abuse in the U.S. alone (Cerner, n.d.).

The headlines speak for themselves. A mother from Fullerton, California, mourned the death of her 17-year-old child, who was found unresponsive after a party (Patel, 2022). A 21-year old was discovered on the bathroom floor by her mother in Nebraska and died from a fentanyl overdose in the hospital two days later (Chapman, 2022). In Buda, Texas, a community gathered to celebrate the would-be birthday of a 15-year old, one of four students in his school who died from fentanyl in 2022 (Al-Shaikh, 2022). Another thought he had been taking Xanax or Percocet to help him sleep but unknowingly took a pill laced with fentanyl and died (Flores, 2022). In Alabama, a 15-year-old girl was found dead in her home after taking fentanyl-laced pills. In Maine, a 14-year-old was found dead after ingesting what she thought was cocaine but turned out to likely be pure fentanyl. Three underage children were found dead in a hotel room in Michigan with fentanyl in their system after an accidental overdose (Russell, 2022; Kovanis, 2021). In Georgia, the number of young people who died from fentanyl-laced drug overdoses spiked in

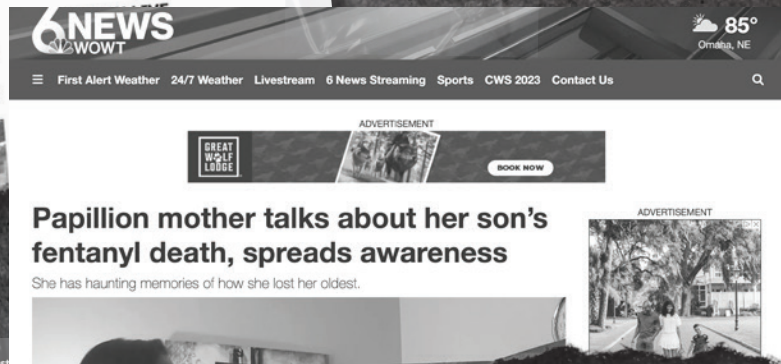
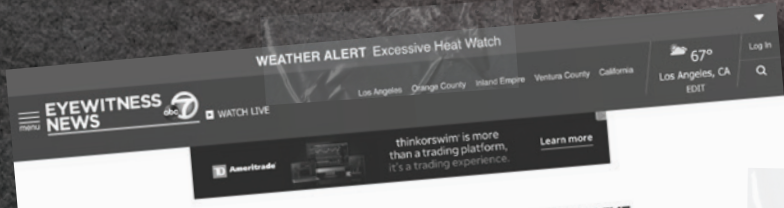
2021 by 800% compared with the year before the pandemic (DPH Georgia, n.d.). A common theme in all of these cases is that these young Americans were unaware that the drugs they purchased contained trace amounts of fentanyl.



The alarming reality is that federal data on fentanyl-related deaths likely underestimates the true scope of this crisis. What is abundantly clear is that families and communities across the country are directly impacted by the fentanyl crisis.

The alarming reality is that federal data on fentanyl-related deaths likely underestimates the true scope of this crisis. What is abundantly clear is that families and communities across the country are directly impacted by the fentanyl crisis. The prevalence of opioid misuse has caused a historic decline in our Nation’s life expectancy in the past few years (Quast, 2020). The fentanyl epidemic strains law enforcement as increased drug use leads to increased crime. Public healthcare and social services are also overrun, with the CDC estimating that the wrong use of opioids costs taxpayers \$78 billion each year (CDC, n.d.). Our Nation is losing a generation of young Americans to the scourge of fentanyl.

THE HEADLINES SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES



THE INVESTIGATION

PUBLIC HEALTH AND THE OPIOID CRISIS

Illicitly manufactured fentanyl is recognized by the CDC as a major contributing factor to the third “wave” of the ongoing opioid crisis, which began decades ago (NCIPC, 2022). The presence of deadly fentanyl is increasing on its own and in many other drugs, including cocaine, marijuana, and street drugs. Americans are clearly worried—6 in 10 people (59%) are concerned that a close friend or family member could accidentally take a fake pill containing fentanyl (RMG Research, Inc., 2023). Victims who encounter illicit fentanyl may take it unknowingly, believing it is something completely different—either another illicit substance or a legitimate prescription drug. Evidence suggests that non-chronic drug users, including adolescents, children, and infants, are frequent victims of accidental fentanyl poisonings.

A large national survey conducted yearly on substance use among adolescents shows that prevalence remained stable in 2022 after declining in 2021 (NIH, 2022). Despite these findings, the number of overdose deaths increased by 94% from 2019-2020 and by 20% from 2020-2021 among 14- to 18-year-olds (Friedman et al., 2022). Of these overdose deaths in 2021, 77% involved fentanyl (Friedman et al., 2022). To account for increased adolescent overdose deaths in the context of decreasing adolescent drug use rates, researchers acknowledged the growing availability of illicit fentanyl and recognized the indiscernible contribution of factors from the COVID-19 pandemic, such as social isolation, mental illness, suicidal ideation, and changes to the illicit drug market. Overall, the results support the conclusion that illicit fentanyl, taken either knowingly or unknowingly, is becoming more deadly.

Equally concerning is that deaths from fentanyl poisonings are being reported in adolescents with no history of drug use. This means fatalities could be occurring in first-time opioid users or those obtaining non-opioid pills (including antidepressants such as Xanax or stimulants such as

Adderall) from a source other than a prescription pharmacy or medical clinic (U.S. DEA, n.d.). According to a CDC article, 83.9% of adolescent (ages 10-19) overdose deaths involved illicitly manufactured fentanyl, yet only 35% of adolescents in the study had a documented history of opioid use (Tanz et al., 2022). The article further delineates that counterfeit pill evidence was present in one-quarter (24.5%) of adolescent overdose deaths, and 4 in 10 (40.9%) adolescents had evidence of mental health conditions or history of treatment (Tanz et al., 2022). These data points illustrate that the majority of adolescent fentanyl overdose deaths are in young people who have no record of previous opioid use and those with no history of treatment or evidence of poor mental health.

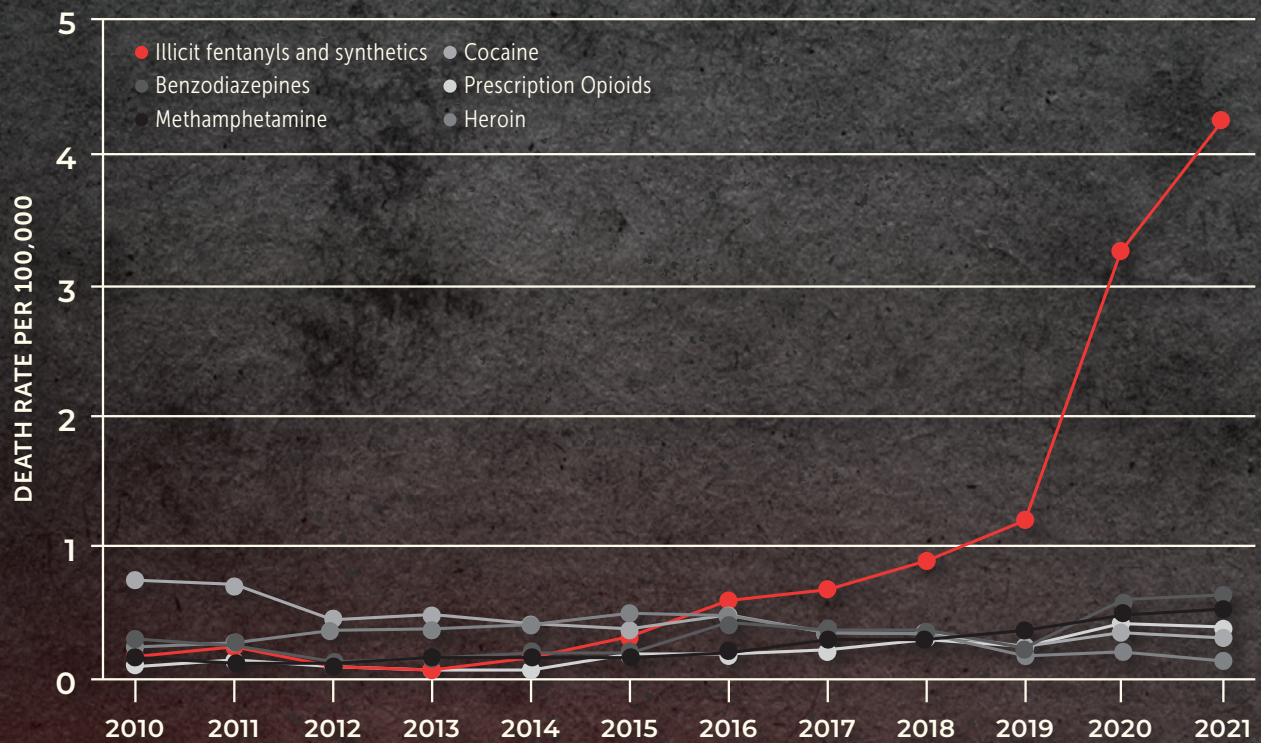
Infants and young children are also dying from fentanyl poisonings. A recent research report from Yale School of Medicine evaluated pediatric deaths from fentanyl from 1999-2021 (Gaither, 2023). In 1999, fentanyl was involved in 5% of pediatric opioid deaths, but in 2021, it was involved in 94% (Gaither, 2023; Tomassl, 2023). Of the 1,557 fentanyl-involved pediatric opioid deaths in 2021, 133 were in children under age 5—40 infants and 93 children ages 1-4 (Gaither, 2023; McPhillips, 2023). This marked a nearly sixfold increase among children younger than 5 years since 2018 (Gaither, 2023; Reinberg, 2023).

Although all findings are tragic, the data for infants and children represents perhaps the most compelling evidence that the opioid crisis has expanded far beyond one that only affects chronic drug users and those who use illicit substances to one that places the general population at significant risk. Such accidental poisonings are an emerging new facet of the opioid crisis, along with opioid dependence and abuse, creating a need for targeted policy solutions to reduce the growing number of senseless deaths from accidental fentanyl ingestion.

“

Victims who encounter illicit fentanyl may unknowingly take fentanyl believing that they are taking something completely different, or believe they are taking a legitimate prescription drug.

TRENDS IN DRUG OVERDOSE DEATHS AMONG U.S. ADOLESCENTS JANUARY 2010 – JUNE 2021



Source: Friedman et al., 2022 (JAMA. doi:10.1001/jama.2022.2847)

THE AMERICA FIRST STRATEGY TO FIGHT FENTANYL

THE AMERICA FIRST STRATEGY TO FIGHT FENTANYL GET TOUGH ON CHINA

The CCP poses the most comprehensive threat to our national security since the fall of the Soviet Union three decades ago. However, a major difference is that the CCP is far stronger economically and culturally and is embedded into nearly every aspect of American life, including the health of our communities and families. Accordingly, China's destructive role in the American fentanyl epidemic must be understood in this larger context and must be combated in a holistic way.

China has the world's second-largest economy which has experienced unprecedented growth in recent decades, but post-COVID dysfunction and structural challenges have made it relatively fragile. Its continued success depends largely on an environment of massive American investment and American consumer spending. Systematic trade and supply chain reform could alter the CCP's strategic calculations regarding fentanyl, and immediate punitive measures such as tariffs and sanctions have changed China's behavior in the past and could do so again.

Accelerating the strategic decoupling of U.S. critical supply chains from the CCP is the best way

for Washington to maximize the policy options available to combat the fentanyl trade. "Strategic decoupling" dictates that we prioritize alternative solutions for the most sensitive and critical pieces of our supply chains first. These critical supply chains include materials related to advanced computer chips, critical minerals, energy infrastructure, and military hardware.

The U.S. government also must bolster key trade provisions to maintain pressure on the Chinese economy, ensuring that we have leverage in other areas of the bilateral relationship like drug policy. We must sustain the Section 301 China tariffs, which penalize unfair CCP intellectual property theft, and maintain the Phase One trade agreement between the U.S. and China, which includes strict and enforceable provisions on technology transfer, agriculture, financial services, and trade (USTR, 2020).

Coinciding with Phase One negotiations in 2019, the U.S. and China disclosed unprecedented law enforcement cooperation in cracking down on fentanyl smuggling (Reuters, 2019). In the same year, as a result of negotiations with the Trump Administration, China declared a ban on

all fentanyl-related substances (Greenwood and Fashola, 2021), which led to a substantial reduction in direct fentanyl shipments to the U.S. market from China. Unfortunately, these were largely channeled to indirect routes via Mexico and Canada. In the words of the DEA's Matt Donahue, "You push on a balloon, it pops somewhere else" (Feng, 2020). China's opaque government and civil society make it challenging to fully verify the enforcement of any declared reforms, and CCP officials resort to angry denials when pressed on their responsibility for drugs reaching our country (VOA, 2023).

The CCP runs a totalitarian state, and China's role in the fentanyl trade is either supported or tolerated by the regime. The activities of the precursor manufacturers and the Triads who facilitate shipments are almost surely known to authorities and can be terminated at any time. Premier Xi Jinping and his inner circle must be called out on this during private meetings with senior U.S. officials. If dialogue fails, the U.S. should punish the Chinese financial sector by removing CCP banks' access to the American financial system.

Additionally, any individual Chinese citizen on a student visa who is involved in money laundering must be expelled from the country immediately and have his visa revoked. WeChat, an app that facilitates this money laundering, should be banned in the U.S. In September 2020, the Trump Administration announced that it would bar WeChat and TikTok

from U.S. app stores, but this was later challenged in court and vacated by the Biden Administration (Allyn, 2021). In the meantime, bans of TikTok on government employee devices have proven that this type of measure can indeed find success at the federal and state levels (Davis, 2023).

The U.S. government should also use avenues of legal retaliation against the Chinese manufacturers and facilitators of fentanyl exports and the financial institutions that help them. Two major drug traffickers were indicted for the first time by the Trump Administration in 2017 (DOJ, 2017), and the U.S. Department of the Treasury recently enacted sanctions against Chinese and Mexican businesses and individuals (USDT, 2023). If it proves infeasible to scale up these designations and prosecutions, we should explore the possibility of suing the Chinese government for allowing this drug trade to continue.

The failure of the U.S. to successfully deter the CCP from its involvement in the fentanyl epidemic is symptomatic of the macro phenomenon of American overdependence on Chinese supply chains, which limits the policy options of the U.S. government. Strategic decoupling is the key to gaining the leverage necessary for a comprehensive approach to China's role in the fentanyl epidemic. In the meantime, Washington must pursue punitive and piecemeal measures to chip away at the problem.

THE AMERICA FIRST STRATEGY TO FIGHT FENTANYL

SECURE THE BORDER; DEFEAT THE CARTELS

The America First approach to end the fentanyl crisis requires properly recognizing the cartels as public enemy number one for all Americans and proposes policy solutions that reflect the severity of their threat. An “all of the above” approach should be implemented to protect all Americans. The historical approach of combatting the cartels through a law enforcement lens (meaning solely through the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), DEA, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, and other law enforcement partners) is wholly insufficient to combat the magnitude of the threat and has resulted in little success in the past. Furthermore, the current approach employed by the Biden Administration has only emboldened the cartels in their attack on Americans (Wolf & Law, 2023).

The first step is to secure the border. Specifically, the federal government should:

- Resume construction of the border wall system, which is a needed barrier to stop the flow of fentanyl across the border and prevent cartels from smuggling drugs and illegal aliens.
- Reinstate immigration deterrence policies like “Remain in Mexico,” which requires asylum seekers to await their court dates in Mexico, thereby deterring economic migrants from paying the cartels for passage along the dangerous journey north. During the Trump Administration, this policy was extremely successful in disrupting the cartels’ pipeline of human and drug trafficking.
- Get Border Patrol agents back on the line patrolling the border instead of processing illegal aliens for release into the country, which will prevent the cartels from evading them in their attempts to sneak into the U.S.

Second, the U.S. must come to terms with the technological advancement of the cartels and directly counter their actions with proactive measures to stop their criminal enterprises. Doing so requires the following steps:

- Re-prioritize intelligence gathering in Mexico, where current operations fall far short of the threat level. Conducting investigations in the region will better inform the military and law enforcement about cartel activity in order to effectively combat them.
- Invest in technology that can disrupt the cartels’ drone operations.
- Conduct operations that compromise the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of the cartels’ financial and strategic operations, including but not limited to more severe sanctions on banks and wire transfer fees.

Third, the U.S. must get tougher on Mexico and China for emboldening the cartels. Through a strategic policy, the federal government needs to apply pressure on Mexico to stop the manufacture of illicit drugs in their country and the transit of it across the southern border. This includes the following steps:

- Negotiate with the Mexican government using the possibility of the authorization for use of military force against the cartels as leverage and the possibility of severe tariffs. These tactics were successful in the past because the Trump Administration understood the Mexican government’s transactional nature (Wolf & Law, 2023).

AMERICA FIRST STEPS TO SECURE THE BORDER

Resume Border Wall Construction and Reinstatement Immigration Deterrence Policies

01

Recognize and Combat the Technological Advancement of the Cartels

02

Get Tougher on Mexico and China for Emboldening the Cartels

03

Target the Weaponization of Social Media and Use of Payment Companies

04

- Inspect a larger array of the vehicles and commerce that cross the border, when possible, to force Mexico to address black market activities originating from within their borders.
- Suspend DHS's Free and Secure Trade and Secure Electronic Network for Travelers Rapid Inspection systems, which facilitate streamlined entry and exit at our ports of entry.
- Build on the Trump Administration's successful attempt to negotiate with China to ban fentanyl by working with them to ban fentanyl precursors in their country and shut down clandestine fentanyl labs.
- Compel social media and payment companies whose platforms the cartels use as a means of receiving payment from illegal aliens (payment companies) to develop more robust protocols to stop illicit activities on their platforms.
- Increase criminal penalties for both Americans and aliens partaking in human smuggling operations, including for recruitment on social media. Both state governments and the federal governments can participate in this solution.

Fourth, the U.S. must target the cartel's weaponization of social media and use of payment companies for human trafficking and smuggling. Current safeguards do not go far enough to prevent these platforms from being used for nefarious purposes. Policymakers should take the following steps:

The cartels are at fault for the fentanyl flowing into our society, and the human toll they have inflicted already across the country is staggering. Under the Biden Administration's failed border policies, the cartels are succeeding, and Americans are losing. The number of innocent individuals who suffer at the hands of the cartels will continue to rise unless a new strategy is adopted. Defeating the cartels, who have waged war on the American people and their way of life, is a crucial part of the ending the scourge of fentanyl.

THE AMERICA FIRST STRATEGY TO FIGHT FENTANYL

INSTITUTE ENHANCED PENALTIES

To effectively combat the relentless grip of fentanyl on our communities, our Nation must implement stricter penalties against those responsible for its production and distribution. Imposing harsher consequences on manufacturers and distributors would send a clear message that the reckless propagation of this lethal substance will not be tolerated. Accountability must be at the heart of any meaningful effort to reduce aberrant behavior, and this must include holding individuals accountable for their actions.

Ensuring that perpetrators face the full weight of the law for their contributions to the devastation caused by fentanyl is an essential first step. By doing so, we can deter potential offenders, dismantle illicit networks, and safeguard the lives of countless Americans who would otherwise fall victim to this insidious drug. Many states have already undertaken efforts to strengthen and enhance punishments against offenders proliferating the fentanyl trade within the U.S., but many that have not yet done so must act.

In 2022, the state of Florida enacted HB 95, which increased the penalties associated with possessing or distributing fentanyl. The legislation included an enhancement for penalties related to the “sale of a controlled substance within 1,000 feet of substance abuse treatment facilities.” It also included an increase in the “mandatory minimum sentence for trafficking fentanyl from 3 years to 7 years for 4-14 grams, and from 15 to 20 years for 14-28 grams” (Florida Governor’s Office, 2022).

Texas has taken a similarly tough approach to fentanyl, with the state legislature recently passed SB 645, which would allow prosecutors to pursue murder charges against individuals convicted of manufacturing, selling, or delivering fentanyl under certain circumstances (Barragan, 2023). The bill also

made the manufacturing or delivery of less than 1 gram of fentanyl a third-degree felony, punishable for up to ten years in prison.

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Accountability must be at the heart of any meaningful effort to reduce aberrant behavior, and this must include holding individuals accountable for their actions.

The pursuit of harsher legal ramifications related to fentanyl has even emerged in notably liberal enclaves around the Nation. Nevada Attorney General Aaron Ford recently backed a bill that would sentence an offender to “one to 20 years in prison for selling, possessing, manufacturing or transporting 4 grams or more of fentanyl into the state.” This is notable because the attorney general, only a few years ago, actively supported much more lenient legislation that mandated such sentences only for those convicted of possessing at least 100 grams (Stern et al., 2023).

Even the California legislature, well known for its legislators’ proclivity toward drug decriminalization policies, has advanced more than a dozen pieces of fentanyl-related legislation in the build up to the end of its legislative session this year. Some of the proposed legislation would mandate harsher prison sentences for individuals convicted of dealing fentanyl (Nyguen, 2023).

The federal government has not taken this issue lightly either. The U.S. House of Representatives recently passed the HALT Fentanyl Act on a bipartisan vote of 289–133. This bill would permanently place “fentanyl-related substances as a class into schedule I of the Controlled Substances Act,” thereby enhancing the applicable penalties associated with its use, possession, or proliferation (Congress, 2023). As of June 2023, the bill is before the United States Senate and is widely expected to pass there as well, after which it will head to the President’s desk for enactment into law.

Enhancing the legal penalties against individuals convicted of the manufacture, sale, and distribution of fentanyl is a vital step toward combating the

devastating effects it inflicts on our communities. Society sends a clear message that certain behaviors will not be tolerated when the laws governing the punishment of those behaviors correspond adequately to the effect they have on society.

Detering individuals from experimenting with drugs—unwittingly or otherwise, as fentanyl is often surreptitiously laced into other illicit substances—can be supported through comprehensive and targeted drug education and prevention programs. These programs are important, but they need to be coupled with stronger penalties if our Nation hopes to achieve noticeable reductions in the proliferation of fentanyl use.

States are taking action with efforts to enhance and strengthen fentanyl related punishments.

CALIFORNIA

Even the California legislature advanced more than a dozen pieces of fentanyl-related legislation.

TEXAS

The state legislature recently passed SB 645, which would allow prosecutors to pursue murder charges against individuals convicted of manufacturing, selling, or delivering fentanyl under certain circumstances

FLORIDA

In 2022, Florida enacted HB 95, which increased the penalties associated with possessing or distributing fentanyl.

THE AMERICA FIRST STRATEGY TO FIGHT FENTANYL

OPTIMIZE PUBLIC HEALTH AND EDUCATION

Combating the fentanyl crisis will also require public health policy and education solutions to address the growing number of senseless deaths from accidental fentanyl ingestion. Therefore, lawmakers should prioritize policies that reduce the supply of illicit opioids and increase access to life-saving efforts for someone experiencing an overdose due to fentanyl poisoning.

As previously mentioned, the first step toward combating this scourge is to permanently classify all fentanyl analogues as Schedule I substances under the Controlled Substances Act. Schedule I drugs have no currently accepted medical use, a high potential for abuse, and a lack of accepted safety for use of the drug (Law et al., 2022; U.S. DEA, n.d.a).

Lawmakers must also increase access to life-saving opioid reversal agents. Naloxone is an opioid antagonist that rapidly reverses an overdose due to opioids and illicit fentanyl (NIDA, 2022). The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recently

approved Narcan nasal spray for over-the-counter sale at pharmacies, which makes naloxone as easy to purchase as ibuprofen (U.S. FDA, 2023). Expedient review and approval of more over-the-counter naloxone products would ensure price competition on retail shelves and wider access to this life-saving product. Also, 84% of voters favor over-the-counter availability of opioid reversal agents like naloxone (RMG Research, Inc., 2023). Other factors affecting access, such as cost and coverage by health plans, should also be considered.

States have acted to improve access to naloxone by allowing pharmacists to dispense it without a prescription. Currently, all 50 states allow this through either a state standing order or a specific state protocol, such as those who ask for it (LAPPA, 2022; SAFE Project, n.d.).

Policymakers should also consider broadening access to and education on opioid reversal agents.

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Lawmakers should prioritize policies that reduce the supply of illicit opioids and increase access to life-saving efforts for someone experiencing an overdose due to fentanyl poisoning.

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Lawmakers must also increase access to life-saving opioid reversal agents. Naloxone is an opioid antagonist that rapidly reverses an overdose due to opioids and illicit fentanyl (NIDA, n.d.).

The CDC's State Unintentional Drug Overdose Reporting System (SUDORS) shows that in 2021, two-thirds of all drug overdose deaths had at least one potential opportunity for intervention, including 46% with a potential bystander present (NCIPC, 2022). Intervention actions could increase with naloxone readily available in high-traffic public spaces, including schools and colleges, public transportation stations and airports, and larger retail spaces, such as shopping malls and grocery stores. Nearly nine out of 10 voters (89%) agree that keeping naloxone in first aid kits in locations such as these is important (RMG Research, Inc., 2023).

In June 2023, Texas Governor Greg Abbott signed a bill that allows the provision of naloxone at institutions of higher education under the state opioid antagonist program and another bill requiring education on fentanyl abuse prevention and drug poisoning awareness in grades 6-12 in Texas public schools (TX SB 867, 2023; TX HB 3908, 2023).

Nationwide education efforts are also of paramount importance. The DEA has launched the “One Pill Can Kill” campaign to educate the public on the dangers of fentanyl, including when it is unknowingly present in a pill made to look like a legitimate prescription drug (U.S. DEA, n.d.b.). This campaign, along with state efforts, creates opportunities for communities to partner with advocacy organizations on effective education programs for specific populations.

Finally, co-prescribing naloxone when prescribing opioids is a commonsense educational strategy to help combat accidental fentanyl poisonings. The purpose of doing so is to have an effective antidote in the home of a person with a prescription in case the prescribed opioids are taken in too large an amount, taken accidentally at the incorrect timing intervals, or taken by an unintended person in the home. It also gives the healthcare provider an opportunity to educate patients and families about the best practices for having opioids in the home, including safe storage and disposal and how to reverse an overdose with naloxone. Twenty states currently have laws on co-prescribing (LAPPA, 2022).

When done correctly, legislation, education, and regulatory action are powerful forces to combat the illicit drugs harming our Nation and to save tens of thousands of children and adults killed by fentanyl poisonings each year.



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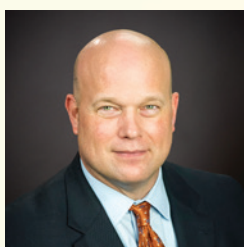


The Honorable Chad Wolf

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER, & CHAIR, CENTER
FOR HOMELAND SECURITY & IMMIGRATION

Center for Homeland Security & Immigration

The Center for Homeland Security and Immigration at AFPI is devoted to protecting the American people, American interests, and the American way of life. Our “America First” approach requires an immigration system that prioritizes border security and the value of citizenship, a strong and persistent counterterrorism effort, resiliency of our critical physical and digital infrastructure, and agility in the face of ever-shifting foreign threats and influence.

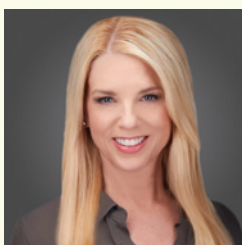


The Honorable Matthew Whitaker

CO-CHAIR, CENTER FOR
LAW & JUSTICE

Center for Law & Justice

To preserve and uphold the sanctity of America’s foundational principles, the Center for Law & Justice at AFPI develops policies that support the American people’s right to live and prosper in free and secure communities. During the past two years, we have highlighted the government’s unequal application of the law, shined a light on progressive prosecutors subverting the rule of law, and articulated the need to uplift and sustain our law enforcement community. The Center will continue to hold government accountable when necessary while always recognizing the importance of the very institutions that are needed to support our American way of life.

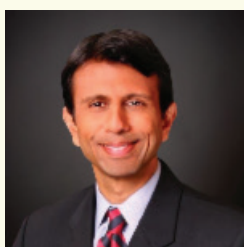


The Honorable Pam Bondi

CHAIR, CONSTITUTIONAL LITIGATION
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Center for a Healthy America

Our Nation’s healthcare system has the world’s best medical innovation, specialty care, and scientific discovery. However, rising costs and diminished consumer control have made healthcare affordability and access top concerns for many Americans. The Center for a Healthy America works every day to address these issues and put healthcare back into the hands of the American people. By educating the public and policymakers on effective policy solutions, the Center aims to put patients and doctors in control. We also support policies that will dignify life, promote better health outcomes, improve access to high-quality care, and lower healthcare costs. During the past two years, the Center has advanced these goals by becoming a trusted resource for state and federal policymakers, creating an America First healthcare agenda, cultivating strategic partnerships, producing high-quality research, and co-authoring successful model policies. The Center is working to help improve the health of all Americans so they can more fully realize the benefits of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.



The Honorable Bobby Jindal

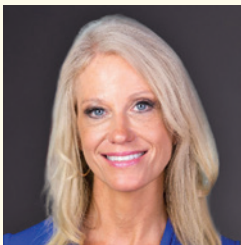
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The Honorable Steve Yates
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China Policy Initiative

AFPI recognizes that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) represents the most comprehensive threat to our national security since the fall of the Soviet Union three decades ago. Every day, the China Policy Initiative team is working to develop policies that will help secure America's economic prosperity, supply chains, and energy independence. By doing so, we are promoting an America First approach toward China that will reverse decades of self-destructive policies and neutralize the threat of the CCP while avoiding war. The China Policy Initiative has helped bring the issue of countering Chinese aggression to the forefront through innovative research, meeting with federal and state policymakers and allied diplomats from the region, building coalitions, shaping the narrative, and amplifying America First solutions in the media.



The Honorable Kellyanne Conway
CHAIR, CENTER FOR THE AMERICAN CHILD

Center for the American Child

America's future is built on the solid foundation set forth by our Constitution, and it becomes stronger as we provide our children with safe, healthy communities and empowering opportunities for growth. As the world evolves and technology advances, our children become more vulnerable, and the need to strengthen the policies that protect them becomes ever apparent. The Center for the American Child works to preserve our children's dignity by advocating for attainable solutions to some of the most complex and deeply rooted obstacles that stand in their way, including issues with the foster care system and the negative mental health impacts of social media. By developing ideas for policies that educate and promote a healthy child the Center will continue working to help provide a brighter future for America's children, enabling them to pursue the American dream.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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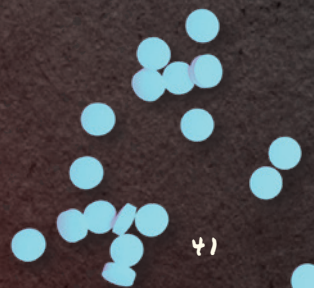
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