

BERNARD SANDERS
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ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES
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PENSIONS
VETERANS' AFFAIRS

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4504

332 SENATE DIRKSEN OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20510
(202) 224-5141

1 CHURCH STREET, 3RD FLOOR
BURLINGTON, VT 05401
(802) 862-0697
1 (800) 339-9834

www.sanders.senate.gov

February 5, 2018

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman
Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
428 Senate Dirksen Office Building
Washington, DC 201510

Dear Chairman Alexander:

As a senior member of the Committee, I respectfully request that the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions hold a hearing focusing on the role of pharmaceutical manufacturers and distributors in precipitating and exacerbating the deadly opioid crisis that is sweeping our country. As you know, this epidemic has not only cost us hundreds of thousands of lives, but has also cost federal, state, and local governments hundreds of billions of dollars for health care, law enforcement, and reduced productivity.

As you may recall, on April 14, 1994, the CEOs of the seven largest tobacco companies testified before the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health and Environment in an historic hearing. That committee had the courage to demand that the leading executives of the tobacco industry tell the American people what they knew and when they knew that tobacco was addictive, a major health hazard, and had killed millions of people. Though all denied under oath believing tobacco was addictive, we now know they were lying. But the hearing eventually led to real change—the FDA now regulates tobacco and the rate of smoking in the U.S. is at an all-time low. Importantly, that hearing contributed to the ability of states to reach a settlement with the tobacco industry, wherein the companies provided \$246 billion for treatment and prevention efforts.

Now the time has come for Congress to summon that courage again and bring the executives of the pharmaceutical industry before our committee to investigate these companies' knowledge of the addictive properties of opioids.

It is no secret that the United States has an epidemic on its hands. In 2016 alone, over 63,000 people died from opioid overdoses. From 1999 to 2016, the number of opioid overdose deaths more than tripled. U.S. life expectancy as a whole fell for the second year in a row, due in part to the increase in opioid-related deaths. Between health care costs, reduced productivity, and premature deaths, the CDC estimates this epidemic is costing the United States more than \$78 billion each and every year.

This crisis did not happen in a vacuum. Thanks to the work of many investigative journalists, we know that pharmaceutical companies lied about the addictive impacts of the drugs. In other

words, they knew how dangerous these products were, but refused to tell doctors and patients. We also know that companies and distributors teamed up to flood small towns with far more pills than they could ever need in a lifetime. Yet, while some of these companies have made billions each year in profits, not one of them has been held fully accountable for its role in this crisis. Individual states have received small settlements from companies after taking legal action, but not nearly enough to pay for the costs associated with the opioid epidemic.

The states cannot do it alone. It is time for the United States Congress to investigate this crisis, to learn what the drug companies knew about these products, and to hold them accountable in helping communities all over this country address this deadly and expensive crisis.

I plan to introduce legislation to hold these companies accountable for the destruction they have caused. My bill would prohibit illegal marketing and distribution practices with respect to opioids, create public accountability for these companies and the CEOs, and require companies to reimburse the economic impact of their products.

I appreciate that the HELP Committee has held multiple hearings on the opioid crisis, with a fourth hearing scheduled for this week focusing on the impact the opioid crisis has had on children and families. However, while these hearings address vitally important topics, none address the role of the pharmaceutical industry and what their leadership did or did not know about the addictiveness of prescription opioids.

The public needs to know whether or not the industry's marketing practices were complicit in creating this crisis, and given the HELP Committee jurisdiction, it should be at the forefront of investigating all of the causes that led to this epidemic. Thank you for your consideration of my request.

Sincerely,



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator