



Boozman Bulletin: Responding to the Opioid Crisis on Multiple Fronts

Dak Kees, U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Arkansas, recently brought federal charges against a Texarkana doctor after an investigation uncovered that he prescribed over 1.2 million dosages of opioids to more than 15,000 patients over a two-year period.

These are shocking numbers. But then again, every number related to the opioid epidemic is alarming.

According to the latest data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), more than 130 Americans die every day from opioid overdoses. The opioid crisis claimed the lives of 47,000 Americans in 2017.

The impact of this national epidemic has been felt acutely in the Natural State. CDC data showed we had the second-highest prescribing rate over recent years—enough for each Arkansan to have more than one opioid prescription in his or her name. It has taken a conscious effort by the medical community to drive those numbers down from approximately 250,000 opioid prescriptions per month in 2014 to nearly 220,000 opioid prescriptions per month in the later portions of 2018—a 12 percent decrease over a four-year period. Rogue actors writing illegal opioid prescriptions cannot be allowed to set back the progress that Arkansas's medical professionals have made to responsibly reduce that number.

That's why the announcement of these charges is so important. We cannot stem the tide unless we enforce accountability among prescribers.

At the press conference announcing the charges, Kees said "I hope this is a wake-up call. And trust me when I say, there will be many more wake-up calls to come." Both Kees and Cody Hiland, U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Arkansas, have been empowered to hold suspected over-prescribers responsible. This move sends a clear message as to their intention to crack down on this behavior in order to end the plague of opioid addiction in Arkansas.

Ensuring illicit opioids do not continue to flood our communities and state without consequence is an important part of our overall strategy. Congress has responded to the

crisis with a variety of solutions aimed at promoting a comprehensive approach to reverse the trend. In Fiscal Year 2019, the National Institutes of Health awarded \$945 million in grants to improve treatment for chronic pain, decrease the rate of opioid addiction and aid in long-term recovery of opioid addicts.

In addition to funding, Congress has taken action by providing tools to drive innovative and long-term solutions that will spur the development of new non-addictive painkillers and ensure parity in mental health and substance use disorder benefits.

With my support, Congress increased family-focused care and encouraged recovery by supporting states' efforts to address substance use disorders by increasing access to medication-assisted treatment, health professionals, long-distance care and recovery housing services.

The treatment and recovery aspect of our strategy is key. Federal resources are being deployed nationwide to break the cycle of addiction. These grants are invaluable for facilities that give addicts and their families new hope in the fight against opioid abuse. We have a responsibility to ensure that these investments are delivering the intended results. The good news, from what I've seen firsthand at treatment facilities in Arkansas, is that these efforts are indeed helping.



You can help break the cycle of addiction by participating in Arkansas Take Back on Saturday, October 26 and dropping off expired, unused and unneeded drugs at [a collection site close to you](#).

Quick Takes:

- **Cybersecurity Protection and Awareness:** We all have a stake in safeguarding sensitive personal data. I have seen the commitment of Arkansans to support cybersecurity efforts at all levels of government, in our homes and private businesses. The American Cyber Alliance hosted its 2nd annual Arkansas Cyber Summit last week bringing together leaders from across the state to discuss the need for enhancing collaboration to reduce cyber threats. October is recognized as

Cybersecurity Awareness Month. [Read my latest column](#) about the need to renew our focus on protecting our data and the efforts by Arkansans to combat cyberattacks.

- **Protecting Arkansas Wildlife and Traditions:** Leaders at all levels of government must take action to fight the spread of chronic wasting disease (CWD). Arkansas conservationists and sportsmen are increasingly concerned about this disease and its impact on wildlife and sport hunting. Last week, the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works held a hearing examining the effects of disease on wildlife conservation. I [shared with my colleagues](#) the innovative ways the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission is fighting the spread of CWD, supporting conservation and protecting our wildlife so we can keep the tradition of hunting alive and well for future generations.
- **Improving Veterans Benefits:** Sometimes it takes an act of Congress to modernize VA benefits, like in the case with the Blue Water Navy legislation which expanded benefits to veterans who served aboard ships off the coast of Vietnam. In other cases, the VA gets new information about exposure to toxins or side effects that makes veterans eligible for additional benefits, which opens the door for revising the department's policy. I am hopeful that we can build on the recent momentum, and the recent [Senate Veterans Affairs Committee hearing looking at the topic of toxic exposure](#), to ensure all of our veterans who answered the call to serve get the care they have earned.
- **Welcoming an Arkansan as Guest Chaplain:** I was pleased to welcome Dr. Robert Lewis, the former directional leader of Fellowship Bible Church of Little Rock, to the Senate recently. He [delivered the opening prayer in the U.S. Senate](#) as the guest chaplain. Dr. Lewis is a renowned pastor, best-selling author, passionate speaker and Christian visionary. The Senate Chaplain invites two ordained clergy members, each month, to pray in the Senate as guest chaplains. Guest chaplains have represented all the world's major religious faiths.
- **Recognizing Arkansas Veterans:** The 'Salute to Veterans' series honors the service and sacrifice of Arkansas veterans who served our nation in uniform. In the latest edition, I highlighted the service of former Arkansas National Guard Adjutant General and veteran of Operation Desert Storm [Major General \(retired\) William Wofford](#). He served for 43 years in uniform. MG Wofford's entire interview will be submitted to the Library of Congress Veterans History Project.
- **Connect on Social Media:** Stay up to date with what I'm doing for Arkansans via social media. You can find me on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).



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