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FOR YOUR INFORMATION
Idaho Politics Weekly
Salt Lake City, Utah
Sunday Aug. 12, 2018
by U.S. Sen. Mike Crapo
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Comprehensive attack needed to fight opioids

An important part of furthering progress in combatting opioid abuse is ensuring resources are in place for every piece of the response to this pervasive problem.

Medical examiners, coroners and toxicologists have an important role in addressing the opioid crisis, and they have had increased manpower and resource pressures as more autopsies and toxicology testing are required to respond to increased deaths from opioid abuse. I joined a bipartisan effort to ensure that local forensic medicine is properly supported in addressing this crisis.

In a letter to the Director of the Centers for Diseases Control and Prevention (CDC) Dr. Robert Redfield, 11 fellow senators and I urged continued support for forensic medicine practitioners and asked the Director to describe ways in which the CDC can better help forensic medicine practitioners in light of the growing opioid crisis nationwide. We wrote, “Suspected overdoses cases are not all the same and are not all based on a single drug or single piece of evidence, resulting in an enormous workload and tremendous physical and emotional strain for medical examiners, coroners, and toxicologists.” These demands, along with physical resource constraints, such as limited laboratory capacity, could compromise essential information for combatting this problem.

In June, I had the opportunity to learn more about local recovery efforts, specifically in Latah County, making a difference in reducing the opioid problem in Idaho. Latah Recovery Center Director Darrell Keim, of Moscow, reported that since the center opened in 2015 drug and alcohol-related crimes have been “down significantly” in the area. He credited the partnerships between local entities that receive funding from local, state and federal levels.

Also, the American Medical Association (AMA) reported progress nationwide in reducing opioid addiction issues, through steps like reducing prescriptions for opioids, monitoring prescription drug use and increasing the number of physicians trained in treating opioid abuse. Still, much needs to be done, as the AMA noted that more than 115 people die every day from opioid-related overdoses.

Efforts continue to provide comprehensive support for critical partners in the fight against opioid abuse. In October 2017, the White House declared the opioid crisis a public health emergency in an effort to expand access to support services, specialists and other assistance. To help ensure that communities have needed resources, I supported enactment of the 21st Century Cures Act, legislation that authorized federal grant funding to support states in increasing access to treatment needs and reducing opioid-related overdose deaths. I also supported passage of the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act, which enables federal grants to states to address substance abuse and misuse, and promote recovery. Federal dollars have helped establish nine

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community recovery centers around Idaho as the state focuses on recovery access particularly in rural communities.

The Senate Finance Committee, on which I serve, has held multiple hearings to evaluate effective ways to address the opioid epidemic and actively continues to work on bipartisan legislation aimed at improving the federal response to the opioid epidemic. This includes the committee's unanimous approval, in June, of the Helping to End Addiction and Lessen (HEAL) Substance Use Disorder Act that targets improvements for opioid addiction for beneficiaries and families utilizing services through Medicare and Medicaid. The legislation now awaits further consideration by the full Senate.

Opioid abuse has crept into all parts of our country, destroying lives and requiring a range of skills and professions to fight it. There are big glimmers of progress in this effort, and we must continue to get all the needed tools in place to help those who are working hard to protect American families from this destructive problem.

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