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EDITORIAL: Poisoning America, a political calculus

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If news broke about the discovery of fissile material for development of a nuclear bomb that had been seized at the southern border, the nation would suddenly go on high alert with concerns about safety of its citizen. Yet the nation's leaders have taken a cavalier approach to a similar threat flowing across the southern border- the synthetic opioid drug fentanyl- that is killing hundreds of thousands annually and shackling even great numbers in addiction.

This past Sunday, Aug. 21, the nation's Drug Enforcement Agency, with very little publicity, declared the day as the first annual Fentanyl Awareness Day. The idea was to amplify the threat of this insidiously addictive and highly dangerous drug.

"Fentanyl is the single deadliest drug threat our nation has ever encountered," DEA Administrator Anne Milgram said in the announcement about the event. "Fentanyl is everywhere. From large metropolitan areas to rural America, no community is safe from this poison."

Despite the growing awareness of deaths resulting from fentanyl use, and the continuing seizure of large amounts of fentanyl crossing the southern border, the topic gets only brief mention in the news.

In July the U.S. Custom and Border Protection Agency along the Mexican border seized 2,071 pounds of the lethal drug, according to a recent Washington Times article.

The medical community estimates that only two milligrams of fentanyl are lethal for an average person. There are 453,593 milligrams in one pound, which means that one pound of the drug would kill 226,796 average Americans. Using those same numbers on the 2,071 pounds of fentanyl seized in July, that haul alone would kill 453 million people. For comparison, the U.S. population is approximately 334 million.

That July seizure, while the largest so far this year, only added to increased numbers of the synthetic opioid being stopped. Kitty Alvarado, a reporter with San Diego's Public Broadcasting System, posted a report earlier this month that the border protection agency had already seized over 8,400 pounds of fentanyl in the nine months prior in San Diego and Imperial Counties, California alone.

In recognition of Fentanyl Awareness Day, family members of those who have died gathered at the North Carolina Capitol on Sunday to bring attention to the growing epidemic of fentanyl overdoses.

Patricia Drewes told Carolina Journal reporter David Larson that she organized the event after learning that the DEA had established Aug. 21 as National Fentanyl Awareness Day. Ms. Drewes lost her only child, Heaven, to a fentanyl overdose in 2019.

"I fight so that she did not die in vain," she said. "And that one thing, I'm adamant about. She did not die for nothing."

Dr. Beatriz Villarreal, director of the nonprofit Mano a Mano Foundation, disagrees with the term overdose. He told the San Diego PBS reporter that "The problem with this is everybody calls it an overdose, and it's not an overdose. It's poison. You've been poisoned by fentanyl because the kids who are dying from this, they don't know they're taking fentanyl.

Dr. Villarreal is right. Fentanyl is poison and if it is not killing its users, it is making them even more dependent on the next hit of the drug. This synthetic opioid is 50 times stronger than heroin and 100 times stronger than morphine, so a little bit goes a long way in producing a euphoria that is very addictive.

The increased amounts of drugs flowing across the very, very porous southern border, along with thousands of illegal immigrants, is proving to be a threat to the country's health and future. The CDC reports that of the 107,000 overdose deaths reported last year, 71,000 (66%) were attributed to fentanyl.

Over the past seven years the North Carolina Office of Chief Medical Examiner places the number of deaths attributed to fentanyl poisoning (Dr. Villarreal's description) at 9,929. In 2021 the state recorded 3,163 deaths, a 30% increase over the previous year.

In discussing her experience with the loss of her daughter Heaven because of the fentanyl overdose, Ms. Drewes pointed to the lack of attention to the growing problem on the part of both the state and federal governments.

"It's made in China in illegal labs," she told the Carolina Journal reporter, "and is sent straight to Mexican cartels and through our open southern borders. We've got children being murdered. And they're being murdered," she emphasized. "They're being deceived to death. They don't know they're getting fentanyl."

In her comments she identifies three needed steps to stop the poisoning of America's future. The first is to close the southern border. The second is to be more aggressive in informing the public. "When COVID came out, within weeks we knew exactly what to do," she noted.

And thirdly, Ms. Drewes said the state needs to use the death-by-distribution law that was approved by the legislature in 2019. That law allows prosecutors the authority to charge dealers with a felony if their product leads to death of the user.

The lack of concern on the part of the Biden administration about the flood of fentanyl flowing across the southern border is disturbing, but understandable. There are more votes to be had by illegals coming across the border, and any attention to the fentanyl disaster threatens his party's political future. And of course, he benefits as he cozies up to the pharmaceutical industry with COVID-19 and Monkeypox vaccines. It is ironic however, that it was the pharmaceutical industry that created fentanyl.