

House GOP shines light on fentanyl crisis, blames open border for mounting overdose deaths



Rep. Jim Banks, R-Ind., right, and Rep. Jim Jordan, R-Ohio, left, exchange places at the podium during a news conference at the Capitol in Washington, Wednesday, July 21, 2021. Banks, who was rejected by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi as the ... [more >](#)

By [Mica Soellner](#) - *The Washington Times* - Thursday, September 15, 2022

House Republicans are shining a spotlight on the [fentanyl](#) crisis, which they said has been exacerbated by President Biden's loose border policies.

At a Capitol conference, the conservative Republican Study Committee turned over the stage to parents whose children died of [fentanyl](#) overdoses and had come to Washington to share their stories and help lawmakers craft legislation to combat the epidemic.

"I don't want to hear that anybody else I know and love has died over this. I don't want any more moms to go to bed at night crying because they've lost their kid," said Lori Ashenfelder, a North Carolina mother whose son died of [fentanyl](#) poisoning last year.

More than a dozen parents whose children died in connection with the opioid epidemic attended the event.

[Fentanyl](#), a synthetic opioid, is 50 times stronger than heroin. Illicit manufacturing makes it widely accessible and affordable. Drug dealers often mix it with other substances leading to surprise overdoses.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recorded more than 56,000 deaths in 2020 involving synthetic opioids, such as [fentanyl](#). The trend is on the rise.

Rep. Jim Banks of Indiana, chairman of the Republican Study Committee, introduced legislation that would enhance penalties for distribution of a Schedule I or II controlled substance in candy packaging that could be targeted toward children.

The Drug Enforcement Administration last month warned of the spread of "rainbow [fentanyl](#)" or colorful pills that resemble candy. Law enforcement has seized such pills in at least 18 states.

Schedule I drugs are deemed to have no medical use and are highly addictive, including heroin, LSD and ecstasy. The federal government still lists marijuana as a Schedule I drug, though many states have legalized medical and recreational marijuana use.

Schedule II drugs have some medically acceptable use but have a high potential for abuse and addiction. These include [fentanyl](#), methadone and Vicodin.

Republicans also vowed to support policies that would secure the southern border, which they said is key to mitigating the rise of preventable deaths by [fentanyl](#).

“It’s really unfortunate the Biden administration is not acknowledging this because of them opening the border on Jan. 20, 2021,” said Rep. Tom Tiffany, Wisconsin Republican. “My concern here is that, as a result of their actions on the border, they feel they can’t acknowledge part of what happened over the border, which is a flooding [of [fentanyl](#)] into the United States.”

Rep. August Pfluger, Texas Republican, said his district’s proximity to the border gives him a clear view of the issue. He blamed the flood of [fentanyl](#) on lax immigration laws.

“It’s affecting all my colleagues. Some of the issues with illegal immigrants are more concentrated in districts like mine, but the issue of [fentanyl](#) is everywhere,” he said.

Elsewhere at the Capitol, Democrats insisted that the southern border was not the sole source of the [fentanyl](#) crisis. They warned that Republicans were creating a skewed perception linking migrants to criminals who traffic illegal drugs.

“We actually know that [fentanyl](#) comes in much more through ports,” said Rep. Madeleine Dean, Pennsylvania Democrat. “Some [fentanyl](#) comes through the border, but the bulk of it comes in through ports, so I hope [Republicans] don’t just use it to demonize our immigration problem.”

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