



COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY & COMMERCE
DEMOCRATS
RANKING MEMBER FRANK PALLONE, JR.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 9, 2018

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Pallone's Opening Remarks at Full Committee Markup

Washington, D.C. – *Energy and Commerce Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ) delivered the following opening remarks today at a Full Committee Markup of Opioid Related Legislation and H.R. 4606, H.R. 5174, H.R. 5175, H.R. 5239, and H.R. 5240:*

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Today the Committee will consider a large number of bills reported out of our Energy and Health Subcommittees.

The four cybersecurity bills before us will enhance the Department of Energy's efforts to strengthen the cybersecurity of our nation's electricity grid and pipeline network. I support these four bipartisan bills and commend my colleagues who have taken leadership on the issue.

While I commend Rep. Green's effort to improve Rep. Johnson's LNG licensing bill, I cannot support even an improved version. I believe an unrestricted export policy could significantly impact domestic natural gas prices and adversely affect American consumers and manufacturers.

We will also consider two user fee agreements dealing with animal drugs and over the counter – OTC – drugs. Both have had extensive debate and deliberation and aim to give FDA important resources and authority to ensure the safety and effectiveness of these products.

In addition to these bills, today's markup mainly focuses on proposals to address the opioid epidemic. This complex public health crisis facing our nation requires thoughtful, measured solutions. As I noted during the Subcommittee markup, I will evaluate the opioids bills in this Committee based on two principles: whether the proposal meaningfully improves access to treatment for opioid use disorders, or whether the proposal helps to prevent people from getting addicted to opioids in the first place.

There are 25 small bills before us that make incremental changes around prevention and recovery. I support them all and commend the sponsors who have found ways to strengthen our laws within the drug supply chain and our public health system.

I am concerned, however, that many of the proposals that most meaningfully improve or expand treatment for opioid use disorders will not be discussed today. For instance, I support the legislation that my colleague Ms. DeGette is working on to exempt a short supply of medication-assisted treatment from prior authorization requirements. I think this bill could have an immediate and meaningful impact on access to medication assisted treatment. But that bill was not included in this process. I also asked the Chairman to include a bill that I have introduced with Representative Richie Neal, the Ranking Member of the Ways and Means Committee that would extend Medicare coverage to methadone clinics. Currently, seniors with opioid use disorders do not have access to treatment at methadone clinics, which has been a longstanding gap in the Medicare benefit. Failure to close this gap would be a missed opportunity and a serious shortcoming in any final legislative package to address the opioid crisis.

There were also a number of substantial bills during the Subcommittee process that were left off the table that could have made an immediate impact on those already affected by the crisis. The most notable is Mr. Tonko's TREAT Act that would have an immediate effect on the number of providers treating opioid addiction in our communities. Also missing from today's markup is the Rural DOCs Act, which would have increased the treatment capacity for substance use disorder treatment. And there is still significant uncertainty about what Medicaid and Medicare policies will eventually be marked up next week.

Mr. Chairman, as we move forward we need to be deliberate and thoughtful. And we need to address the evolving nature of the epidemic, which includes a shift away from prescription medications to extremely deadly opioid analogs like fentanyl. The shift exacerbates the need to expand access to life-saving, evidence-based treatment, in addition to focusing on prevention.

I hope to continue to work with my colleagues on today's list of opioids bills, in addition to the others moving forward.

Thank you, I yield back.

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