

Statement of  
**The Honorable Patrick Leahy**

United States Senator  
Vermont  
March 22, 2010

Statement Of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.),  
Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee,  
Hearing On "Effective Community Efforts to Counter Drug-Related Crime in Rural America"  
Barre, Vermont  
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Today the Senate Judiciary Committee returns to Vermont to hear from the people of Barre about the community's efforts to combat the persistent problems of drug-related crime in rural America. Vermont's civic-minded, all-hands-on-deck approach to dealing with this serious problem continues to help advance a dialogue throughout the country about what solutions work best to address drug-related crime in rural areas.

I have held similar hearings in Rutland and St. Albans in recent years to discuss this issue, and I will keep focusing on it and working with you as long as drugs and the crime they bring continue to hurt the people of small towns and small cities in Vermont and across America.

The Senate Judiciary Committee takes this issue seriously. I am glad to have with me today Senator Sheldon Whitehouse of Rhode Island, a leading thinker in the Senate on criminal justice issues. The fact that we will hear testimony today from President Obama's "drug czar," Director Gil Kerlikowske of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, is a sign that drug-related crime in rural areas is a national priority. I know Director Kerlikowske will take the lessons from today's hearing very much to heart as he moves toward unveiling a National Drug Control Strategy.

Drug-related crime is not just a big-city issue. It is a serious and continuing problem in rural communities in Vermont and across the country. The problems here in Barre, as in so many other small communities, are serious, but the people of Barre are not taking them lying down. They are fighting back and joining together as a community to find innovative, community-based solutions to these complex problems, working aggressively with law enforcement, but also emphasizing prevention and treatment efforts, which are crucial.

I know well from my time as a State's Attorney prosecuting major drug cases that strong and effective law enforcement is one essential piece of the puzzle in combating the scourge of drugs. Unfortunately, for much of the last decade, the Federal Government did too little to support hard-working state and local police. Cuts in Federal funding and economic difficulties led to unacceptable vacancies in the Vermont State Police, and in local police departments here and around the country.

I have been working hard with the new administration to reverse this trend. Last year's recovery legislation included a massive and much-needed infusion of Federal funds to state and local police, and we have continued to raise support levels since then. We have restored funding to the COPS and Byrne grant programs, which fund state and local law enforcement, and brought back the Rural Drug Enforcement Assistance grant program. These steps mean that, in this time of economic difficulty, state and local police are able to keep or even hire officers, implement new and innovative programs, and better coordinate their work at the local, state, and Federal levels.

Here in Vermont, I have heard from police that this Federal assistance is making a real difference. Support for state and local police, together with consistent funding for the Vermont Drug Task Force and the New England High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area program, has yielded real results. Cooperation at all levels, and substantial participation from the Vermont Drug Task Force, were crucial to recent law enforcement successes including the bust of a major cocaine-dealing ring in South Burlington last month.

Even as we appropriately strengthen law enforcement and push for vigorous punishment of those who commit serious crimes, we have to recognize that law enforcement cannot and should not solve these problems alone. Again and again, police chiefs here in Vermont and across the country tell me that we cannot arrest our way out of the problem. Instead, more and more cities and towns like Barre are finding that the best solutions involve all segments of the community coming together with law enforcement to find meaningful, community-based solutions that address the underlying causes of these problems. Solving these problems as they arise is essential, but preventing them is even better, and less expensive.

Drug-related crime in Barre and the surrounding area has been a serious and growing problem. Heroin, imported by drug networks outside of the state, has torn apart lives and led to related crimes and violence. Too often, break-ins and other crimes can result from drug users looking for money or drugs to feed their addictions. More and more people are also becoming addicted to prescription painkillers like Oxycontin. Perhaps most disturbing is the fact that more and more of our children than ever before are turning to these drugs at an early age.

The good news is that Barre, like other Vermont cities, is showing leadership in responding to these problems. Local law enforcement has joined with state and Federal partners to target those who bring drugs to Vermont from big cities and urban areas. Equally important, local law enforcement is working with schools and community groups to focus on mentoring and prevention and try to ensure that our children do not become involved with these terribly destructive drugs in the first place. I look forward to hearing from Colonel L'Esperance about these successful partnerships.

Combating drug use and crime requires equal attention to enforcement, prevention, and treatment. The best way to prevent crime is often to provide young people with opportunities and constructive activities, so they stay away from drugs and crime altogether. If young people do get involved with drugs, treatment in many cases can work better than punishment to help them to turn their lives around. Good prevention and treatment programs have been shown again and again to reduce crime.

Regrettably, the Bush administration consistently sought to reduce funding for these important programs, but I am glad to see that the current administration, under Director Kerlikowske's leadership, has restored the emphasis on prevention and treatment. It is vital that we continue support community prevention-based programs like the Drug Free Communities grant program and the Boys and Girls Clubs and that we continue to seek new and innovative ways to bring communities together to tackle these intractable problems.

The Senate held a very valuable hearing earlier this month on innovative and cost-effective crime reduction strategies, where Chief Mike Schirling of Burlington, along with other national leaders in this area, got us thinking about better and smarter ways to make our communities safer. But it is important for the Senate Judiciary Committee to hold hearings not just in Washington, but also in the communities that face these problems day in and day out so we can learn from those on the front lines about the strategies that work.

We of course want to hear about what the Federal Government can do to help. But I have also learned from speaking to the people who tackle these problems every day that the most important element to successfully addressing drugs and crime can be for the communities themselves to work together to find solutions that work for them. That is what is happening in Barre, and that is what I look forward to hearing about from our distinguished witnesses today.

I look forward today to hearing from community leaders like Barbara Floersch, who will tell us about vital youth programs that keep children away from crime and drugs, Damartin Quadros, who will talk about the mobilization of the business community to help make Barre a safer and better place, and of course Mayor Lauzon, who has shown great leadership in encouraging the whole community to work together on these problems. I also look forward to hearing the inspiring story of someone who herself overcame her demons and turned her life around. There is no single solution to eliminating drugs and related crime, but these witnesses and others like them recognize that we all need to work together to turn our communities around.

I am glad to welcome so many Vermonters to the hearing today who care about and work on these issues. We have Federal, state, and city officials, state and local law enforcement, educators, experts in prevention and treatment, concerned parents and citizens. In the great tradition of this state, Vermonters come together in times of hardship, and I am proud to see all of you here once again today, ready and willing to work together on this problem.

I look forward to the testimony of our witnesses and to working with you all long after this hearing is over.

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