

Testimony of
Mayor Thomas Lauzon

March 22, 2010

Statement By:

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before:

United States Senate Judiciary Committee
Field Hearing
Effective Community Efforts to Counter Drug Related Crime in Rural America
Barre, Vermont

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Mr. Chairman, Senator Whitehouse, Director Kerlikowske, on behalf of the city of Barre, I extend a warm welcome and sincere thanks for the opportunity to discuss community efforts to counter drug-related crime in rural America.

I want to extend my thanks also, Mr. Chairman, to your staff. From the very first phone call since I took office four years ago, they have been generous and sincere with their assistance and concern for Barre, for Vermont and for America. The offer to serve as host for this hearing was no exception. During our initial telephone conversation, Maggie Gendron asked me if I would mind hosting a hearing of the United States Senate Judiciary Committee. She told me the hearing would focus on drug addiction and drug related crimes in rural America. I was, and remain, grateful for the opportunity.

At the time, it struck me as somewhat peculiar that the Chairman of the United States Senate Judiciary Committee would ask the mayor of Barre, Vermont for permission to hold a hearing in his community. I thought at the time that you were simply being polite, because that's in your nature. It took me a while to consider the possibility that perhaps some communities would rather not host a hearing on drug addiction and drug related crimes. That perhaps some believe that talking about drug problems in their communities will cast them unfavorably or is an admittance of failure. I do not subscribe to that theory. We cannot solve problems that we're not willing to identify and talk about openly. In order to solve our problems, we need to be honest about their existence, accurate in our assessment and expedient in our actions. An addict in Burlington should be of concern to the citizens of Stowe. A victim in Woodstock should be of concern to the citizens of Brattleboro. As the fastest aging state in the nation, Vermont cannot afford to lose the unrealized potential of young lives to drug addiction and drug related crimes. With increasing demands on our resources, we cannot afford policies that are not proactive.

Mr. Chairman, you have long advocated for and promoted a three-pronged approach to combating rising crime levels in America - prevention, treatment and enforcement. I believe that approach is both sound and proven.

Of the three approaches, I am perhaps best known for my views on enforcement. And that is not by choice. As a society, we have a fascination with enforcement and punishment. I have observed during my tenure in office that sound bites relating to enforcement receive much more attention than sound bites relating to prevention and treatment. That needs to change.

While enforcement is a necessary component in our efforts to reduce crime in America, it does not, in and of itself, solve the problem. Enforcement generally occurs after damage has occurred. My strong preference is to focus on prevention and treatment. Prevention and successful treatment are more cost effective and yield more desirable results.

Treatment, like enforcement, occurs after damage occurs. But unlike enforcement, treatment offers recovering addicts a positive end result.

In my opinion, aggressive prevention is critical to mitigating the effects of drug addiction and drug crimes in America. While we are experiencing some positive trends within several categories of recreational drug use among our younger citizens, the sharp increase in prescription drug abuse has me especially concerned. According to the 2009 Monitoring the Future survey, non-medical use Vicodin and OxyContin is increasing among those aged twelve or older and is roughly even with those who smoke marijuana. These drugs are highly addictive and create a dependence that is physiologically and psychologically very similar to heroin. Appropriately, OxyContin is referred to as "killer" on the streets. Left unchecked, these trends will result in thousands of overdose deaths and millions of dollars in treatment and incarceration costs across America.

OxyContin is a pain management drug. While it mitigates the effect of pain and disease, it does not prevent or cure disease. It was first introduced by the manufacturer in 1995. In 2002, the Director of the Office of New Drugs for the FDA testified before the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions and recognized OxyContin as a valuable product when used properly. The Director went on to testify that the FDA was working closely with the manufacturer to take appropriate action to curb the misuse and abuse of OxyContin. In the eight years since that testimony, the trends relating to misuse have become increasingly troubling. I believe we need to re-examine the cost benefit analysis of OxyContin manufacture and distribution as it relates to increased illegal use and distribution.

Lastly, I believe we need to be more vigilant in identifying young people at risk and more inclusive in our approach to prevention. I believe that in addition to our continued focus on and education of young people at risk, we need to focus on their families and offer additional counseling and support. We need to mitigate the factors that place our young people at risk. Where appropriate, I believe family counseling and support should be a requirement, rather than a choice.

In closing, the struggles we talk about today do not define Barre or Vermont or America. We are defined by our potential. We are defined by those who defy the odds and rise above challenging

circumstances. Most importantly, we are defined by the exceptional people, many of whom you will hear from today and thousands more who are hard at work at this very second, helping those who are struggling with addiction or crime. Thank you.