

**Statement for the Record submitted  
by Senator Jim Bunning  
Senate Health, Education, Labor &  
Pensions Committee  
Hearing on problems associated with abuse  
of the prescription pain-relief drug OxyContin  
February 12, 2002**

---

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee. I appreciate the Committee's willingness to hold a hearing on this very important issue before us today.

OxyContin was approved by the Food and Drug Administration in 1995 and has been celebrated as a "miracle drug" for people who suffer from chronic pain and patients with terminal cancer. OxyContin, is a controlled substance, like morphine and other intense pain relievers, and has been found to have a high potential for abuse. It is supplied in a controlled-release dosage form and is intended to provide up to 12 hours of relief from severe pain. The tablet must be taken whole and orally. However, when crushed in can be snorted or diluted to be injected where then the drug produces an intense high which many users say is equal to, or even better than, heroin. Therefore, it is as well, highly addictive.

The illegal use and sale of OxyContin has risen dramatically throughout the nation, but nowhere as prominently as in the rural areas of the eastern United States. While the problem has been most heavily documented in Appalachia, criminal cases are popping up at alarming rates all across the United States.

In Eastern Kentucky, the illegal use of the drug has risen to epidemic proportions. After

nearly an eight-month investigation, details started to emerge in early February 2001 of an elaborate multi-state “pipeline” that ran from Greater Cincinnati to the mountain communities in Eastern Kentucky. During a raid in Eastern Kentucky, Federal agents and local police arrested over 200 people ranging in age from 20 to 65 for the abuse of OxyContin. This drug has torn families apart, ruined lives, and stretched the resources of law enforcement and social service agencies to its limit.

Using pharmacists and doctors in several states, suppliers are evading a computerized watchdog system in Kentucky known as KASPER (Kentucky All-Schedule Prescription Electronic Reporting system) and successfully slipping thousands of the pills into Eastern Kentucky where many residents are wrestling with OxyContin addictions. Data from the Kentucky Cabinet for Health Services shows there were 82,880 prescriptions filled for the drug in 1999. In 2000, the total prescriptions filled almost doubled and jumped to 156,660. This is not only amazing, but is frightening.

It has been alleged that Purdue Pharma, the producer of OxyContin, has marketed the drug excessively without stressing its addictive nature. In testimony before the House Appropriations Committee’s Commerce, Justice, State and Judiciary Subcommittee, the Drug Enforcement Administration said that Purdue Pharma had contributed to its “disproportionate abuse” by aggressively marketing it as less prone to abuse than similar drugs.

My Kentucky colleague in the House of Representatives, Congressman Hal Rogers recently requested that the General Accounting Office (GAO) investigate the marketing of the

prescription drug OxyContin. I am anxiously awaiting GAO's study with the hopes that its findings will present Congress with some alternatives and justifications to help stem the abuse of this "miracle drug." While I certainly do not want to see this "miracle drug" prohibited from being manufactured, marketed and prescribed. I do, do however, want to ensure that if there are abusive marketing, distribution and prescription practices, that they be ended to make our families stronger and communities safer.

The abuse of this drug is literally ripping apart families and communities in Eastern Kentucky. The OxyContin addiction is so strong in some areas that some are beginning to prostitute themselves to pay for their addiction to the drug. Burglaries and robberies are up in Appalachian Kentucky, and law enforcement point the finger at OxyContin addiction. These problems are not just relative to Kentucky, but all across the nation the abuse of this addictive drug has turned good people into drug dealers and addicts, and some communities have been turned into places where neighbors and acquaintances are feared because of OxyContin.

I appreciate this Committee taking the time to take a look at this problem. It is not a problem that is going to go away quickly, but I hope from this and other hearings we can find some solutions to stem the abuse and addiction of OxyContin.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

