

**Secretary of State Mike Pompeo
Remarks at Senate Narcotics Caucus
June 11, 2019**

Good afternoon. I'd like to thank Chairman Cornyn, as well as Chairwoman Feinstein for having me today.

I'm here today to offer brief remarks on the opioid crisis – on its causes, its consequences, and State's role in finding solutions.

This is a personal mission for me as a former Congressman from Kansas.

Last month, 7 Kansans died in a 10 hour period from an overdose of cocaine laced with fentanyl. I've spoken with many families personally affected by this crisis.

Opioids have robbed our youth of their futures, torn apart families, and crippled communities across the country.

You might wonder why the Secretary of State is thinking about this issue. It's very straightforward:

Most of the opioids sold in the United States are manufactured and trafficked into this country from abroad. The State Department has a clear role to play in working with our friends and partners overseas to curb the supply of these drugs into the United States.

Let me give you a brief tour of what we're doing.

We've focused much of our energy on China, the largest source of illicit fentanyl sold on U.S. streets, which is purchased online and delivered directly to users and dealers through the mail, or shipped into Mexico and then trafficked over our southern border.

My Department, along with the Justice Department and other interagency partners, have been pressing Chinese authorities persistently for several years to increase controls on fentanyl and other dangerous substances. On May 1, China fulfilled its pledge to President Trump to control all fentanyl-like substances -- which potentially number in the thousands -- and develop an enforcement plan.

We've seen some encouraging signs: new criminal penalties, ranging from jail time to death, have convinced producers to shut down labs.

We'll continue to monitor the situation to ensure China fully holds up its end of the bargain. Names like "China White" and "China Girl" – slang terms for Chinese fentanyl – shouldn't be part of America's vernacular.

Then there's Latin America. Mexico remains a production hub for methamphetamine and heroin, and a transit country for cocaine, fentanyl, and other drugs. The State Department is working with our Mexican partners to change these dynamics, and last Friday, we signed a joint declaration in which Mexico pledged to take unprecedented steps to dismantle human smuggling and trafficking organizations.

The United States is also doing its part.

To disrupt criminal enterprises, we've donated equipment to Mexican law enforcement and security forces, and trained their officers to eradicate poppy, interdict drugs on their way north, and shut down drug labs. Mexico seized more than 130 metric tons of meth last year, more than 12 times the volume seized in 2017.

We've also provided Mexico with drug-sniffing dogs, as well as vehicle scanners, biometric identification tools, and other specialized equipment. We're working with the Justice and Treasury Departments to improve Mexico's ability to investigate financial crimes.

Challenges remain.

Mexico needs to develop clear metrics so the United States can better understand its progress – or the lack thereof – in reducing drug production and trafficking. We need Mexico to interdict more drugs, eradicate more poppy, and bring drug traffickers to justice.

I'll say just a few more words about the rest of our hemisphere before taking your questions.

In Colombia, I've met with President Duque twice this year already. On both occasions, he pledged to continue our strong partnership in fighting drug trafficking.

Unfortunately, Mr. Duque's predecessors halted eradication programs, and coca cultivation increased.

Working closely with my Department, the Duque administration in Colombia has changed course.

Together, we've quadrupled the number of civilian eradicators. And the payoff is clear: Colombia destroyed over 60% *more* coca in the first 4 months of this year than during the same period in 2018.

In countries like Panama, El Salvador, and Costa Rica, we've seen huge successes as well – especially when it comes to drug interdiction.

Peru and Paraguay, which I visited earlier this year to discuss these and other issues, have also made significant strides.

And in the Caribbean – America’s “third border,” through which 10% of our narcotics pass en route to the United States – cocaine seizures have skyrocketed. To give you one example, our seizures this year in the Bahamas and Turks and Caicos have already surpassed last year’s totals several times over.

I'm proud of my team, which coordinated with foreign partners, the U.S. Coast Guard, and the Drug Enforcement Administration.

Finally, to Venezuela. Venezuela is a narco-state, controlled by the Maduro mafia. Its porous borders, broken judicial system, almost nonexistent cooperation on international drug controls, and institutionalized corruption makes it hard for us to stem the flow of drugs to the United States.

We'll have a much better chance to solve that problem by supporting the Venezuelan people's quest to restore democracy and good governance.

In closing, the State Department appreciates recent steps the Senate has taken to address the opioid crisis, like last fall's bipartisan opioid bill, and its new package screening requirements.

The opioid crisis hits close to home for almost all of us. In each of your states, as in my home state of Kansas, families are robbed of their sons and daughters. Losing a life to opioids is losing one life too many.

We at the State Department are doing our level best to stop these drugs before they ruin more American lives.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.