

**TESTIMONY**  
**OF**  
**RYAN HAMPTON**  
**PERSON IN SUSTAINED RECOVERY FROM AN OPIOID USE DISORDER**  
**ADDICTION RECOVERY ADVOCATE**  
**AUTHOR, “AMERICAN FIX: INSIDE THE OPIOID ADDICTION CRISIS—AND**  
**HOW TO END IT”**

**BEFORE THE**  
**SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT & INVESTIGATIONS**  
**COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES**  
**U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
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## **Testimony of Ryan Hampton, Opioid Addiction Recovery Advocate**

*U.S. House Natural Resources Committee, Subcommittee on Oversight & Investigations*

February 26, 2019

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee: my name is Ryan Hampton and I'm a person in sustained recovery from an opioid use disorder. What that means to me is that I haven't felt it necessary to take a drink, a drug, or any other mind-altering substance since February 2, 2015. I celebrated four years abstinent from all substances at the beginning of this month. My recovery means that I'm able to show up for my community and call out the systems that have contributed to the deadly public health crisis that's claiming over 130 American lives every single day. It also means that I am living proof of the damage done to our country by the coordinated, seismic misinformation campaigns launched against the American public beginning two decades ago by major pharmaceutical manufacturers and distributors.

My personal experience with opioids is the same as many other people's. I injured my ankle while hiking and was given a prescription for an opioid painkiller. I didn't think twice about taking these pills. At the time, I was on the up-and-up. I was living my passion, working in the White House and getting active in policy and politics. I knew that if I stayed on my path, I'd one day have the career I dreamed of. However, the lies that big pharmaceutical companies pushed to people like me set me on another path. After I took that first pill, my life was irrevocably changed.

My daily use of prescription pills developed into a full-blown addiction in a very short period of time: we now know that taking opioids for more than five consecutive days significantly increases the odds of long-term use. The odds of chronic opioid use also increase

when a second prescription is given or refilled. That was true for me. I became a daily opioid user, eventually injecting heroin. I was homeless, hopeless, and out of resources. I panhandled, got free meals at the shelter, and begged for help from anyone who would listen. Without my mother's constant love and belief in me, I don't think I would have made it to treatment.

My addiction stole ten years of my life that I will never get back. It all started with a pill.

I didn't know it, but the doctor who gave me my first prescription—and kept refilling it—was incentivized by the pharmaceutical company that manufactured the drug. She told me what that company's marketing team had told her: that the pills weren't addictive as long as my pain was real, that they weren't "habit forming" if they were taken as prescribed, and that it was unlikely for me to experience withdrawal since I was given the prescription in a clinical setting. Saying these things out loud, they sound ridiculous. They're fairy tales. Yet, at the time, this misinformation was accepted throughout the medical industry as normal, real, and true. I know this to be true from my lived experience and because since entering recovery, I have spoken with many physicians, such as some of my former doctors, who've confirmed this with me throughout the course of the past 2 years through research for my book, and told me that yes, indeed these pharmaceutical companies pushed this falsehood early on. In fact, some of these doctors served or are currently serving prison time for their actions in misleading patients. These lies were not harmless: they were intended to boost Big Pharma's profits, absolve the industry of any responsibility for the deaths their products caused, and shift the blame onto the people they sickened. This link between pharmaceutical marketing and overdose deaths is not a coincidence. A study in *JAMA Network Open* found that marketing for opioids to doctors across the US increased the number of county-level opioid painkiller overdose deaths. This is not a case of one or two doctors being influenced. Companies like McKesson and Purdue have recklessly flooded

communities with opioids. Government investigators found that twelve of McKesson's distribution centers had not maintained "effective controls against diversion of particular controlled substances into other than legitimate medical, scientific, and industrial channels," and from mid-2008 through May 2013 it had repeatedly failed to report suspicious orders for controlled substances, including opioids, as required by law. Bypassing federal regulations, paying hefty bonuses to marketing teams and executives, and finding new ways to avoid culpability put *billions* in Big Pharma's pocket. Who's paying the price? Their patients, the American public—people like me.

It's deeply ironic that the very people who were prescribed opioids are now being blamed for the opioid crisis. That's another Big Pharma lie. One of the world's most prestigious management-consulting firm, McKinsey & Company, instructed Purdue Pharma on how to "turbocharge" sales of OxyContin, how to counter efforts by drug enforcement agents to reduce opioid use, and were part of a team that looked at how "to counter the emotional messages from mothers with teenagers that overdosed" on the drug. Richard Sackler—of Purdue Pharma—directed the company to shift marketing efforts toward blaming patients for the growing drug epidemic. In 2001, then-company president Richard Sackler, wrote "We have to hammer on abusers in every way possible. They are the culprits and the problem. They are reckless criminals."

That's right: he was saying that every dead child, parent, friend, or loved one is the one with the problem. Every one of the people who overdoses today is a reckless criminal. Purdue and other companies pushed that myth aggressively, covering for themselves as they continued to pump lethal and irresponsible quantities of drugs into communities that are overwhelmed by the consequences of addiction.

Big Pharma is undercutting our defenses against the crisis as well. Consider that they paid millions of dollars in under-the-table donations to grassroots recovery groups, funneled through advocacy groups and non-profits. Consider that they continue marketing to doctors and other prescribers. Consider that they have yet to make reparations to the millions of people whose lives their products destroyed, or accept responsibility for their role in creating and profiting from this health crisis. It's painfully clear that Big Pharma is still playing a misinformation campaign to win.

Because of corporate greed and misinformation, we are now in the midst of a massive public health crisis that killed 72,000 Americans last year. This isn't just about overdoses: it's widespread harm that touches every community, every neighborhood, and almost every family in America.

When dangerous misinformation spreads at the level of the public's health and wellbeing, people die.

I'm here today because I *lived*. I can only imagine how many others might have lived, as well, if these large corporate conglomerates had only told us the truth from day one.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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