

## **Senator Rockefeller's Efforts to Combat Prescription Drug Abuse**

In the last decade, West Virginia has experienced a tragic increase in deaths and overdoses from prescription drugs. Nine out of ten of the drug-related deaths in West Virginia are due to the misuse and abuse of prescription drugs, especially opioid painkillers. Rockefeller has been working in Congress for several years to raise awareness for the need to fight prescription drug abuse:

- **Sent a series of 29 letters to West Virginia health care providers, schools, and pharmacists, and 13 letters to national health care associations in September 2012 on the importance of making sure prescribers get needed training on controlled substances.** The letters seek ideas on how to make sure prescribers get the right information to face the daily challenges of safely prescribing controlled substances.
- **Designated October as National Medicine Abuse Awareness Month.** Rockefeller has consistently been an original cosponsor of a Senate resolution designating October as “National Medicine Abuse Awareness Month” to draw attention to and educate the public about problems associated with drug abuse and misuse of prescription and over-the-counter medicines. Rockefeller will continue roll out several additional initiatives to combat prescription drug addiction.
- **Added four Northern Panhandle counties (Hancock, Brooke, Ohio, and Marshall) to the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) program in August 2012.** Rockefeller pushed for the Office of National Drug Control Policy Director Gil Kerlikowske to designate these counties as HIDTA counties, which qualifies them for additional federal funding to fight prescription drug abuse and trafficking. He also won an additional \$39 million above the budgeted level for HIDTA.
- **Invited the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to hold a Continuing Medical Education course for West Virginia health care professionals.** SAMHSA’s first continuing medical education course for prescribers -- such as pharmacists, doctors, and nurses -- in West Virginia aimed to help the state’s prescribers, especially those in primary care settings, learn about what they can do to safely prescribe opioid painkillers and reduce the likelihood of abuse among patients.
- **Held a roundtable discussion at Wheeling Park High School in September 2012 on curbing abuse of prescription drugs among students.** The panel focused on four areas: gateways to addiction for students, where addiction leads, how it is treated, and how it can be prevented in the first place.
- **Secured a provision in the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) bill in July 2012 to improve patient and provider education on drug abuse.** The provision, which was included as part of legislation to fund the FDA, requires a study on the best ways to develop and disseminate provider, pharmacist, and patient education tools on prescription drug abuse.

- **Held a Senate hearing on March 22 on “Prescription Drug Abuse: How are Medicare and Medicaid Adapting to the Challenge?”** Rockefeller discussed the role of Medicare and Medicaid in preventing and treating the overprescribing, misuse of, and addiction to prescription drugs.
- **Co-led a letter to the Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education with five other Senators,** asking the Subcommittee to reinstate funding for the National All Schedules Prescription Electronic Reporting (NASPER) program in Fiscal Year 2013.
- **Introduced a bill to prevent the unsafe use of prescription drugs and reduce deaths.** The Rockefeller bill would promote both physician and patient education, and create a uniform reporting system for painkiller-related deaths. The bill would also significantly increase federal funding to help states create and maintain prescription drug monitoring programs that will stop “doctor shopping” and drug trafficking across state lines.
- **Secured additional federal funds to help prevent prescription drug abuse.** In addition to his support for the HIDTA program, Rockefeller has consistently supported funding for important law enforcement programs, such as Drug Courts, Byrne JAG grants, the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) program, and others. The Recovery Act alone provided \$4 billion nationwide and \$25 million for West Virginia to hire police officers, fight crime and drug abuse, and provide services for at-risk youth.
- **Held a roundtable in 2011 with the Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, state and local leaders, health providers, and law enforcement officials in Huntington.** Rockefeller discussed how prescription drug abuse affects families and children in West Virginia.