



October 24, 2022

His Excellency Esteban Moctezuma
Ambassador of Mexico to the United States of America
Embassy of Mexico
1911 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20006

Dear Ambassador Moctezuma,

I have dedicated my time in the United States Congress to addressing the addiction crisis in the United States through increased prevention, treatment, and recovery support. I helped lead the Commission on Combating Synthetic Opioid Trafficking (the Commission), which was established to examine aspects of the synthetic drug threat to the United States. I also founded and co-lead the Bipartisan Addiction and Mental Health Task Force, which is comprised of almost 140 Members of Congress from both parties representing 38 states. Each member of the Task Force is committed to addressing this national emergency. My own family has been impacted by addiction, so I am committed to finding solutions to reduce demand within the United States while also reducing the supply of these deadly substances.

I write today to request that Mexico build on the steps it has already taken to combat international flows of illicit fentanyl and other synthetic opioids by prioritizing the targeting of counterfeit pill operations. As we all continue to respond to real-time developments in the trafficking of drugs, we must ensure that drug control efforts adapt to stop criminal actors.

Our countries share the priority of stopping the flow of drugs and preventing further deaths. Last year, the United States saw 108,886 overdose deaths last year with a staggering 66% linked to synthetic opioids. Projections show that these numbers will only continue to increase. A recent study from Stanford University estimates that between 2020 and 2029, we will lose 1.2 million Americans and Canadians, largely due to synthetic opioids.

President Biden has been clear that addressing the overdose and addiction epidemic is an urgent priority. In March, the President named combatting the addiction crisis as the first pillar of his Unity Agenda during the 2022 State of the Union address. In doing so, the President highlighted

the crisis' significance to the United States and to the international community. In the coming days, we hope that our countries can build on the progress of recent years.

In February 2022, the Commission released a report, which serves as a strategic approach to combating the flow of synthetic opioids into the United States. The report acknowledges Mexico's efforts to address this crisis, including Mexico's participation in the United States-Mexico Bicentennial Framework for Security, Public Health, and Safe Communities, which includes efforts to address drug trafficking and drug use. In addition, the report recognizes Mexico shifting seaport authority to the Secretaría de Marina, as well as the Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional's continued exercise of checkpoint authority on land ports of entry. The report notes that data collection efforts have also improved as Mexican authorities "have been updating fentanyl-specific seizure data more regularly and systematically, and promoting government coordination to update precursor chemical legislation," including the scheduling of four new chemicals in May of 2021. The United States appreciates Mexico's increased initiatives to address the illegal operations of drug-trafficking groups and hold criminal networks accountable.

Despite these efforts, the Commission's report highlights that Mexico is the dominant source of illegally sourced synthetic opioids. Today, cartels manufacture fentanyl in illegal laboratories using precursor chemicals originating largely from the People's Republic of China. The drugs are then trafficked into the United States, principally by land. The Commission's report notes that fentanyl coming from Mexico "accounts for almost all the fentanyl that law enforcement has seized since late 2019."

Critically, most consumers are not seeking out fentanyl. Instead, traffickers have capitalized on fentanyl's lower production costs and Americans' preference for consuming drugs in pill form by lacing fentanyl into other drugs, including counterfeit tablets of OxyContin, Percocet, Vicodin, Adderall, Xanax, and other prescription drugs. These counterfeit tablets may contain fatal doses of fentanyl, which can be particularly dangerous to "unsuspecting buyers or others who might casually consume diverted prescription medications." Between January 2021 and December 2021, the United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) seized 20 million fake pills, which were often laced with fentanyl. DEA lab testing has shown that 4 out of every 10 pills with fentanyl contains a potentially lethal dose.¹

Addressing counterfeit pill operations is critical to saving lives. The Commission's report finds that the Mexican military should shift focus to targeting synthesis labs and counterfeit pill operations and direct attention away from counterdrug efforts aimed at heroin, such as poppy eradication. Efforts should address the illegal importation of machinery and equipment that can be used to manufacture tablets. Mexico should also enhance import controls at points of entry and require that authorities follow up with licensees and operators that use such machinery. By

¹ https://www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2021-12/DEA-OPCK_FactSheet_December%202021.pdf

strengthening government institutions, combating corruption, and improving judicial systems to reduce impunity, Mexico can make strides to address the opioid crisis.

Last week, I was glad to hear of the productive second meeting of the United States-Mexico Bicentennial Framework for Security, Public Health, and Safe Communities, which included discussions on effectively combating drug trafficking. I look forward to our countries' continued cooperation on these issues and appreciate your commitment to Mexican-United States relations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "David Trone". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "D" and a long, sweeping tail.

David Trone
Member of Congress