

Interagency response needed for opioid crisis

On October 26, Acting Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Elaine Duke released a statement on DHS's role in responding to the opioid crisis. Duke's statement followed President Trump's announcement that he would direct the Department of Health and Human Services to declare the opioid crisis a public health emergency.

In her statement, Duke stated that DHS will focus primarily on supply reduction, working with international and U.S. interagency partners to stem the flow of illicit opioids into the U.S. She also laid out DHS's tasks, including Coast Guard Patrols, Customs and Border Protection apprehensions, and Immigration and Customs Enforcement investigations.

- Department of Homeland Security

New office at DHS to counter WMDs

Secretary of Homeland Security Kirstjen Nielsen announced in December 2017 the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction (CWMD) Office. The new office is established at a time when "The United States faces rising danger from terrorist groups and rogue nation states," said Secretary Nielsen.

According to Nielsen, "DHS is moving towards a more integrated approach, bringing together intelligence, operations, interagency engagement, and international action. As terrorism evolves, we must stay ahead of the enemy and the establishment of this office is an important part of our efforts to do so."

The mission of the CWMD Office is to counter attempts by terrorists to other threat actors to carry out an attack against the United States or its interests using a WMD. The office will lead DHS efforts to counter WMD threats and allow for greater policy coordination and strategic planning, while providing greater visibility for DHS's CWMD mission.

The CWMD Office will be led by Mr. James McDonnell, Director of the DHS Domestic Nuclear Detection Office.

- Department of Homeland Security

Interagency task force created to combat illicit opioids

On October 23, U.S. Representative Evan Jenkins (R-W.Va.) introduced legislation aimed at combating the opioid epidemic. The Fentanyl and Heroin Task Force Act creates an interagency task force focused on eradicating the illicit fentanyl and heroin trade.

Representative Katherine Clark (D-Mass.) co-sponsored the legislation. In her remarks, Rep. Clark spoke about how the opioid crisis has ravaged communities, saying "We hear it in the painful cries of ailing newborns, we see it on the faces of desperate parents, and we grieve it in our ever-expanding cemeteries."

The task force would be made up of representatives from multiple U.S. government and law enforcement agencies, including the FBI, the Drug Enforcement Agency, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Homeland Security Investigations, and the Office of National Drug Control Policy, among others. The task force would also work with state and local law enforcement agencies.

- Congressman Evan Jenkins