

**THE OPIOID CRISIS**  
**OUR PRESIDENTS, OUR CONGRESS & BIG PHARMA: UNHOLY ALLIANCE RESULTING IN DEATH**  
**By Dr. Victor Sternberg**  
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I do not know if many of you had a chance to watch "60 Minutes" last week or read the account of the study done by The Washington Post. This is an old story that I've written about in the past. The book I read, "Dreamland: The True Tale of America's Opiate Epidemic by Sam Quinones" opened my eyes to the origin of our opioid crisis. The deaths of young people related to my patients and this week the death of the best friend of an employee's son just continue to remind me of the horror of this affliction.

As incredibly catastrophic has been the loss of over 200,000 American citizens in the last four years, this debacle could have only happened with the implicit and complicit actions of Big Pharma, the medical profession and unfortunately our congressmen, our senators and our leaders in the White House.

For those of you who did not read the recent article in The Washington Post, the gentleman who was appointed to be the "Drug Czar" was the sponsor of a bill which passed unanimously in the House and Senate that basically defanged the Drug Enforcement Agency. Representative Marino from Pennsylvania had been nominated by President Trump to be the "Drug Czar". His nomination was withdrawn 60 minutes after it aired.

The fact that this bill passed unanimously in both Houses and was signed by President Obama is shocking. Don't our representatives do their job or do they just rubber stamp out what will not hurt them at the ballot box? Claire McCaskill claims she wasn't even there for the vote and yet the Congressional Record revealed that she had shown up for the vote and voted for a particular issue involving Planned Parenthood but begged off that she had voted on this issue. The record proved otherwise.

Representative Marino's bill greatly diminished the ability of the DEA to go after middle-level suppliers of opioids. Congressman Marino was the recipient of hundreds of thousands of dollars of contributions made by the drug industry.

Just an aside, many of you may not know that Medicare cannot negotiate drug prices. The VA can, Medicaid can but Medicare cannot. The reason for that is a bill passed in Congress sponsored by a Louisiana senator, the recipient of over a Million dollars in donations from Big Pharma. When he left Congress, he took a job with Big Pharma paying approximately \$2 Million a year. That bill sponsored by the Louisiana congressman and passed by our Congress and our Senate has helped drive drug prices through the roof since Medicare cannot negotiate by law.

Now, back to the opioid crisis. Middle-level distributors have been sending millions of drugs to small town pharmacies in which the populations of these towns number in the hundreds if not low thousands. The delivery of these drugs resulted in them being distributed in pain clinics and other nefarious, often medically-run, establishments in which drug addicts were receiving inordinate supplies of opioids.

What makes this issue particularly onerous to this writer is that every time there is a gun death, particularly a mass killing, we have the Left pointing to the oversupply of guns particularly automatic weapons and the Right bringing out the Second Amendment as a defense against any attempt to reduce the access to guns in America. The gun issue is a wonderful issue for politicians because it enables them to receive support from their constituency. Believe me, if their constituency was either for or against the ready access of guns, they would change their votes. It is a hot-button issue that's exploited by both parties. I'm not here to comment on the validity of the positions but to point out that when it came to the opioid issue, which has now killed more than 200,000 people, 66,000 last year alone, we've heard only a whimper out of Congress. Imagine, we've lost more young men and women in one year than we lost in Vietnam; far more than we lose from gun violence.

Why is there no human cry from Congress? It's simple, there are no political votes or political points to be won by taking a position on opioids. Their failure to wake up and deal aggressively with the explosive availability and disastrous effects

of the free access of opioids is a condemnation of the powers with which we have entrusted them. Their position, "If it doesn't keep me in office, then I don't take a stand".

Over 200 years ago as a new nation was emerging, John Adams wrote "I fear for the future of our country for I believe that future politicians will put their own self-interests ahead of those of the people". Nothing has changed. Whether you are Republican or Democrat, liberal or conservative, it seems your Senator, your Congressperson, and your State Assembly person have done little or nothing to stem the catastrophic plague that dominates our nation. The thought that many of their votes are bought and sold by special interests, in this case Pharma, and their silence is dictated by the fact that there is no political hay to take a position is a terrible condemnation of our nation's politics.

Our founding fathers made a number of mistakes in the Constitution. One of them clear to me is not having term limits which drives politicians "to the well of Lobbyists" to get financed so they remain in power.

Yours truly,  
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