

If you are a public servant and you hear this, please accept my thank you. Well done. I am proud to be your neighbor.

EX-IM BANK

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, we had three extremely well-qualified people come before this body this week who were nominated to the Board of the Ex-Im Bank, the Export-Import Bank. It is an entity that most individuals across the country don't even know about. They don't even know what the Ex-Im Bank does. But it gets caught up in a lot of politics here.

These extremely well-qualified people were confirmed, and they are now on their way to serve our Nation in that area. I had to vote against them, not because of who they are and their qualifications—they are clearly qualified—but because of my own frustration that this body has not been willing to take on the most basic element of reform of the Ex-Im Bank.

The charter of the Ex-Im Bank requires the Bank "to seek to reach international agreement to reduce government subsidized export financing." That is in their charter. The problem is, that is not being fulfilled. There has been a push for a while to try to reform the Ex-Im Bank. That push to reform it has failed so far.

My encouragement to the new quorum that is in the leadership role at the Ex-Im Bank is to push to fulfill their requirements to reduce government-subsidized export financing, not expand it, and to take the actions necessary to do that—not only with our Ex-Im structure but working with other countries to reduce theirs. The common phrase is "We have an ex-im bank because other countries have an ex-im bank." Well, you know what, other countries have a Communist structure—like China. We are not trying to model that either. Should we take on every single subsidy other governments do? Let's try to find a way for them to fulfill their charter.

In the meantime, I have proposed a set of reforms that can be done to the Ex-Im Bank to make it better. Some are fairly obvious.

One of them is reducing taxpayer exposure by prohibiting the Bank from issuing direct loans.

I have also pushed very hard to have this basic statement: a sense of the Senate that the Bank is a lender of last resort, not the first place to go to. That, again, should be a no-brainer for them.

Here is the clearest and easiest reform. Ex-Im Bank brags about how many small businesses use the Ex-Im Bank services, but the next question is not asked. How does Ex-Im Bank define a small business? With chagrin, they will say that their definition of a small business is any business with 1,500 employees or fewer. That is not a small business. So 1,500 employees or fewer is a small business, according to Ex-Im Bank. There are very few companies in America with 1,500 employees.

The most basic thing we can do is have Ex-Im Bank use the same definition the Small Business Administration uses for what a small business is and then put the same requirement on Ex-Im to also use small businesses and engage with them.

We should also prohibit the Bank from providing financing services to foreign and state-owned entities. Why are we financing another government in what they are doing? Why are we actually providing competition for our own companies, as Ex-Im does? They give loans and subsidies to countries and companies that compete against American companies.

All of these ideas are basic reforms.

My push is not to abolish Ex-Im; it is for Ex-Im to fulfill its charter and to do its basic responsibility and to have the most simple reforms that I think are needed.

This is not just talk for us; we have this legislation. We have pushed for this before, and we will continue to push for basic reforms at Ex-Im in the days ahead.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

OPIOID EPIDEMIC

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, I come to the floor today again to talk about the drug epidemic that continues to be such a big issue in my home State of Ohio and around our country. I am here now for my 56th floor speech, I am told, on this topic, sometimes talking about the opioid crisis that has gripped my State the way it has so many others in this Chamber but also talking about other issues that relate to the drug epidemic. It is not just about the prescription drugs, the heroin, the fentanyl, and the carfentanil that have impacted so many women and children and families and devastated so many communities; there are also other issues. The one I want to talk about today is what is happening with regard to crystal meth.

Methamphetamine is back with a vengeance, and we need to have a more effective response to it. Congress has done quite a bit in the last several years to push back against this drug epidemic.

New policies have been put in place at the Federal level for the past few years that are promoting better prevention, treatment, and recovery and helping our law enforcement respond with Narcan—that miracle drug that reverses the effects of overdoses—and helping to ensure that we have a prevention message out there that is more effective.

Congress has now spent more than \$3 billion in additional funding—taxpayer dollars—to support treatment and recovery programs, and it has been needed. The Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act has provided a lot of that, and so has the 21st Century Cures Act. That goes directly to the States.

The good news is that these efforts are actually starting to pay off. Drug

overdose deaths are still way too high. In Ohio, we started with a high-water mark, but after 8 years of more people dying every single year, finally, last year, we saw in Ohio and around the country a reduction in overdose deaths. That is great news. We peaked in 2017 at 72,000 Americans losing their lives. It is the No. 1 cause of death in my home State of Ohio and the No. 1 cause of death for all Americans under the age of 50.

The progress has been particularly encouraging in places like Ohio. We saw a 21.4-percent drop in overdose deaths in the first half of last year, 2018. Those are the last numbers we have and the most recent data we have. That was the biggest drop in the Nation, actually, between July of 2017 and June of 2018. So in that 1-year period, according to the CDC's National Center for Health Statistics, Ohio had the biggest drop in the country. Again, that was partly because Ohio's numbers were so high. We were second in the Nation in overdose deaths, from that data.

Nationally, we are seeing a more promising, if more modest, downturn in overdose deaths. Between September of 2017 and March of 2018, overdose deaths fell from about 72,000 to about 71,000. Overall, the overdose rate dropped in 21 States and nearly a full percentage point nationally. So at least we are seeing some progress finally, after 8 years of increases every year and more and more heartbreak. This is progress.

I think we would have been doing even better, frankly, if we hadn't seen the big influx of fentanyl over the last 3 or 4 years. Again, Congress has passed important legislation, but we are pushing up against more and more fentanyl coming into our communities. That is an incredibly powerful synthetic opioid—50 times more powerful than heroin—inexpensive, and it is coming primarily from China and primarily through the U.S. mail system.

Our pushback on that more recently that is starting to be effective is called the STOP Act. We just passed it in this body last year. What the STOP Act says is that the post office has to start screening packages, particularly from countries like China, from which we know fentanyl is coming in. They haven't done exactly what we asked them to do yet, but they are doing a better job of stopping the poison from coming in from China, which is where the vast majority comes from.

Today, even as we see progress on opioids and as we see somewhat less fentanyl coming in and therefore higher prices for fentanyl on the street, which is important—as we see this progress, we are also seeing something that is very discouraging. What I have been hearing now for over a year from law enforcement, treatment providers, social service providers, and community leaders back home is that there is a resurgence of methamphetamine—pure, powerful crystal meth—coming primarily from Mexico.