



Fentanyl crisis: Alabama Republicans Blame ‘Open Borders,’ while others Blast GOP for Playing Politics

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Two leading Alabama Republicans are joining other GOP colleagues nationwide in blaming the rise in fentanyl-related overdose deaths to a flood of undocumented immigrants arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border.

Alabama Attorney General Steve Marshall and U.S. Senator Tommy Tuberville, in separate comments within the past two weeks, blamed President Joe Biden’s administration’s immigration policies and the record-number of border arrests for what they say is a sign of a rise in drugs entering the U.S.

Their comments come as a bipartisan group of 18 attorneys general sent a letter to Biden last week urging him to have fentanyl reclassified as a “weapon of mass destruction.” Marshall was not among those signing onto the letter. The signatures came from 14 Republicans, three Democratic and one Independent.

“You cannot address the fentanyl crisis without addressing the open border,” Marshall said in a statement Thursday to [AL.com](https://www.al.com). “Alabama’s fentanyl problem can be traced directly to the border and our location on the ‘drug trafficking superhighway.’”

Marshall’s office points to a 2021 Drug Threat Assessment of a six-state region in the South, including Alabama. As part of the assessment, law enforcement officers within the region listed fentanyl right behind methamphetamine as the top drug threat of the region.

The report points to Mexican drug trafficking organizations as the primary threat to the Gulf Coast region, and the primary culprits of moving drugs throughout the region.

“I will continue to do everything in my power to advocate for a secure border to address the effects of both drug and human trafficking,” Marshall said.

Tuberville, in comments he has made on the Senate floor and to the media, said that Democratic progressive politicians “don’t want to stop” the fentanyl crisis because they also back open borders policies “because they want new voters.”

“Americans are losing their lives right now,” Tuberville said during recent Senate remarks. “Lives are being lost every day ... we don’t need a bureaucrat talking points or wasting time, we need a plan, and we need a plan now to stop these drugs.”

The Biden Administration, on Friday, announced it was issuing \$1.5 billion in federal money to support states in addressing the opioid crisis and supporting individuals in recovery. The grant money will fund, among other things, expanded 24/7 Opioid treatment programs and increase access to naloxone medication that can rapidly reverse a drug overdose.

The Alabama Department of Mental Health is slated to receive \$16.3 million.

‘Cynical Politics’

At least one immigrant rights organization says that Republicans pinning the fentanyl crisis on the rise of border arrests are doing so to generate political points ahead of the November midterm elections.

In a late July news release, the immigration rights lobbying organization American’s Voice, blasted Republicans for taking a “cynical” approach of linking the fentanyl and opioid crisis to the immigration issue.

The group, in a news release, said there is no correlation between the rise of U.S. Custom and Border Patrol encounters with immigrants to the overdose deaths in the U.S.

Authorities are on pace to make more than 2.3 million immigration arrests during the government’s 2022 fiscal year, which ends on September 30. That figure would shatter the previous record of 1.7 million arrests, recording last fiscal year.

America’s Voice, in its news release, argues that 99% of all drugs interdicted at the border are brought in through ports of entry by cars, trucks, boats, and planes – not on the backs of migrants and asylum seekers.

The Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank in Washington, D.C., reports that over 90% of fentanyl seizures occur at legal crossing points or interior vehicle checkpoints, not on illegal migration routes. The agency says it’s almost always U.S. citizens, who are subject to less border security scrutiny, who can cross the border legally and who operate as the best drug smugglers.

According to the Cato Institute, only 0.02% of people arrest by Border Patrol for crossing illegally possessed any fentanyl whatsoever.

“Republicans have shown they are uninterested in looking for solutions on immigration or fentanyl,” said Zachary Mueller, political director with America’s Voice, a group lobbying to put 11 million undocumented Americans on a path to full citizenship. “In fact, Republicans

have actively opposed measures to help interdict drugs at the border and help alleviate demand for illicit drugs. It's just cynical politics, not a policy debate.”

Polling shows that a growing number of Americans believe unauthorized migrants play a role in bringing the deadly drugs into the U.S.

An NPR-Ipsos poll recently found that 39% of Americans and 60% of Republicans believing that most of the fentanyl entering the U.S. is smuggled by migrants who are crossing the border illegally.

Overdose deaths involving fentanyl-laced drugs are exploding nationwide, creating a drug crisis that veteran law enforcement agents say is the deadliest they have ever encountered.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention statistics show that 107,622 people died of drug overdoses in 2021 in the U.S., with 66.2% or 71,238 tied to synthetic opioids, mainly fentanyl.

In Alabama, general drug overdose deaths climbed by over 15% between April 2021 to April 2022, which was considerably more than the national averages during that time period.

Lawmakers are worried the potency of fentanyl could lead to something much worse.

Tuberville, during his remarks earlier this year, said he is worried that a small dose of fentanyl could kill entire cities.

“A football weighs one pound and just one pound can kill over 200,000 people,” he said.

“We have to do something about it, or we are going to have a catastrophe in this country with someone putting it in our water supply or in our air. Someone needs to wake up and smell the coffee.”

The attorneys general who signed the September 14 letter to Biden agree. They believe the lethality of the drug equates it more to a dangerous chemical weapon than as a narcotic. They also say that fentanyl is the No. 1 killer of adults ages 18-45.

The letter noted that fentanyl has been used as a weapon by the Russian army to end a hostage crisis, killing more than 120 hostages in 2002.

“The threat of a state enemy using this drug to do harm to the American people cannot be understated,” the letter reads.

“Treating this solely as a narcotics control problem has failed to curb the proliferation of increasing quantities of chemicals that can cause a mass casualty event,” the letter to Biden reads. “Your own DEA Administrator has called fentanyl, ‘the deadliest threat (the DEA) has ever seen.’ We should treat it as such – thus bold action must be taken.”