

Chairman Steve Chabot (R-OH)
Committee on Small Business
“Now Hiring: How the Opioid Epidemic Affects Small Businesses”
September 13, 2018

Before we begin today, I'd first like to welcome Representative Troy Balderson, the newest Member of our Committee from the great State of Ohio. He was sworn in as a Member of the House last week we're delighted he has been elected to the Small Business Committee. His experience as an Ohio State Senator and as a member of two family-owned businesses will be an asset to this Committee. We look forward to working with him on behalf of America's 30 million small businesses.

I now call this hearing to order.

The American economy is soaring. Significant growth is occurring as we speak and Americans, especially entrepreneurs, are once again optimistic about the future of their businesses. Just two days ago, the National Federation of Independent Business Small Business Optimism Index soared a new record high in the survey's 45-year history, showing that small businesses are finally feeling confident and are ready and willing to execute plans to grow their businesses.

However, many small businesses are now facing a new challenge in finding, hiring, and retaining qualified workers. NFIB also noted that 62 percent of small businesses reported trying to hire new employees, with 89 percent of those businesses reporting finding few or no qualified applicants. A record 25 percent of small businesses cited the difficulty of finding qualified workers as their single biggest problem, up two points from last month.

Today, we are here to examine why that might be. In recent Small Business Committee hearings, we have heard reports about how the opioid epidemic is impacting small businesses across the nation. Driven by the rise in opioid prescriptions and the influx of illegal opioid drugs into communities, drug addiction has grown in the United States in recent years. The opioid epidemic touches families and communities all across the nation – so much so, in fact, that President Trump declared the epidemic a public health emergency almost one year ago today.

We have seen that the opioid crisis has the ability to impact businesses, too. Many young working age Americans are not working or actively seeking work as a result of opioid addiction, impeding the ability of businesses to fill important job openings. In 2015, an estimated two million workers were not in the labor force due to the opioid epidemic. According to a recent report by the National Safety Council, more than 70 percent of United States employers have been affected by employees' prescription drug use.

Our witnesses today have taken time away from their busy schedules to share their expertise on this topic, and I look forward to having a productive discussion.

I now yield to the Ranking Member, Ms. Velázquez, for her opening statement.

