



Real Problems,
Our Problems

by James M. Decker

At the recent West Texas Rural Summit, drug addiction—causes, challenges, solutions—was a hot topic. This is a complicated topic that has been on my heart for a while. I hope my readers indulge me as I start a multi-part series on drugs. If we are serious about addressing this problem in our communities, and we should be, this topic deserves a comprehensive look, not just a summary. As we work to improve our communities—beautify them, bring jobs and amenities, make them more prosperous for all—drugs must be tackled by all of our community leaders.

When we think about drugs in our community, a few easy images come to mind. We think of marijuana. We think of out-of-town dealers selling to our locals. We almost certainly think of people cooking and using meth. Those images are all accurate pieces of the puzzle. But the puzzle itself is far more complicated and concerning.

In the last few years, we’ve heard a lot in the news about America’s “opioid crisis,” but it’s hard to talk about why it matters in our communities without defining it. In short, the opioid crisis is an epidemic of drug abuse, death, and community decay arising from abuse of prescription painkillers known as “opioids.”

Opioids became widely available on a prescription basis in the 1990s, with recognizable names like OxyContin, Percocet, and Vicodin. Their use has proliferated in shocking ways. A 2017 government study found that Americans consume more opioids than any country in the world. Enough opioids were prescribed in the U.S. in 2015 to medicate every American around the clock for three weeks. The effects of this usage are horrifying.

According to the CDC, opioid overdoses have quadrupled since 1999. You might think that opioids are a problem, but not in our area. That is not so. CBS News reported that, in 2015, drug overdoses killed more than 50,000 people in America. That 2017 government study found that TWO-THIRDS of all American drug overdoses came from opioids. CBS noted that drug overdoses kill more Americans than either car accidents or guns. In only a few decades of widespread use, opioids are now a stunning percentage of American drug use.

According to the National Institutes of Health, the powerful opioid fentanyl is the most widely

used opioid in America and causes over half of opioid overdose deaths in America. Fentanyl can also be made illegally, like meth, and is often mixed with heroin or cocaine for more powerful effects. Much addiction to “hard” drugs follows a path from prescription drugs. According to the USDA, 3 out of 4 heroin users began with prescription drugs.

Drugs are a shocking problem in America, but here’s the sobering reality. When 2/3 of drug overdoses come from opioids, drug addiction isn’t the result of some wealthy foreign kingpin straight out of a 1980s movie. The causes are much closer to home, and much more concerning.

Why does this matter to us? Drug overdose rates are higher in rural America than the country at large. Why? Rural jobs can be more physical in nature, creating more opportunity for prescription use and addiction. Self-medication is a “solution” for lacking economic opportunity, which is prevalent in rural America. Drug use is harder to combat with rural communities’ limited resources. Law enforcement resources are an issue, but communities also lack treatment and rehab options, as well as quality housing for an addict to escape their past and get a fresh start.

Drugs are not a far off “city” problem. They’re our problem. Moving forward in the next few weeks, I hope to spark conversation and create solutions to that problem.

James Decker is a lawyer, farmer, and mayor in Stamford, and the creator of the forthcoming “West of 98” podcast and website. He may be contacted through Facebook at facebook.com/james.decker.



Bronte ISD
Breakfast
Monday, September 10 Pizza or choice of cereal and toast, juice, milk
Tuesday, September 11 Donuts or choice of cereal and toast, juice, milk
Wednesday, September 12 PB&J or choice of cereal and toast, juice, milk
Thursday, September 13 Tornado or choice of cereal and toast, juice, milk
Friday, September 14 Biscuit and sausage or choice of cereal and toast, juice, milk
Lunch
Monday, September 10 Ham and cheese melt, baby carrots, broccoli salad, apple-pineapple, milk
Tuesday, September 11 Nacho Grande, refried beans, salsa, tomato cup, cucumber slices, peaches, milk
Wednesday, September 12 Chicken sandwich, tots, veggie

cup, Mandarin oranges, milk
Thursday, September 13 Hamburger steak, roasted potatoes, garden salad, biscuits, fruity jello, milk
Friday, September 14 Corn dogs, smiley fries, beans, apple slices, sherbet cup, milk
Blackwell CISD
Breakfast
Monday, September 10 Poptart, fruit, juice, milk
Tuesday, September 11 Breakfast burrito fruit, juice, milk
Wednesday, September 12 Breakfast pizza, fruit, juice, milk
Thursday, September 13 Ham, egg, and cheese combo bar, fruit, juice, milk
Friday, September 14 PBJ or oatmeal round, yogurt, fruit, juice, milk
Lunch
Monday, September 10 Taco Salad Bowl (shell, ground beef, cheese, lettuce, tomatoes), pinto beans, Spanish rice, fruit, milk
Tuesday, September 11 Spaghetti, corn on the cob, salad, garlic toast, fruit, milk
Wednesday, September 12 Homemade meatloaf, mashed potatoes, glazed carrots, hot roll, fruit, milk

Thursday, September 13 Chicken fajitas, Spanish rice, refried beans, salad, fruit, milk
Friday, September 14 Chicken sandwich, potato cubes, baked beans, fruit, milk
Robert Lee ISD
Breakfast
Monday, September 10 Pancakes, sausage, fruit, juice, milk
Tuesday, September 11 Burrito, hashbrown, fruit, juice, milk
Wednesday, September 12 Power breakfast, fruit, juice, milk
Thursday, September 13 Piggies, yogurt, fruit, juice, milk
Friday, September 14

Griddle sandwich, fruit, juice, milk
Lunch
Monday, September 10 Corn dog, tator tots, baked beans, apple-pineapple delight, milk
Tuesday, September 11 Nachos grande, beans, salsa, cucumber slices, lime sherbet, garnish, milk
Wednesday, September 12 Chicken sandwich, fries, corn, sliced veggies, Mandarin oranges, milk
Thursday, September 13 Asian bowl, egg roll, rice, salad, fruity gelatin, milk
Friday, September 14 Pizza, carrots, broccoli salad, fresh fruit, graham crackers, milk

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Water Weekly

For the week of 09/03/18

Water conditions

The latest drought map, for conditions as of August 28, shows drought expanding and intensifying around the state. The total area of the state in drought increased 2 percentage points. Rains over Labor Day weekend should bring some improvements to the next map.

Drought conditions

- 62% now
- 60% a week ago
- 40% three months ago
- 1% a year ago

