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**Statement by Congressman Greg Walden**

**November 18, 2004**

**Subcommittee Criminal Justice,  
Drug Policy and Human Resources**

**Hearing on Law Enforcement and the  
Fight Against Methamphetamine**

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to address the Subcommittee on this critical issue.

The rampant increase in methamphetamine (“meth”) production, trafficking and abuse in recent years is cause for concern throughout the entire United States, especially in my home state of Oregon.

With just over one percent of the nation’s population, Oregon produced over seven percent of all admissions for substance abuse treatment throughout the country; and the drug is now second only to alcohol for such admissions in the state.

Oregon’s children suffer tremendously with the rising production and abuse of meth, and they consequently run the risk of becoming complacent toward its destructiveness. In Oregon, there has been a 57% increase in the number of female youth treated for meth and a 23% increase in male youth since 1999. In 2003, there were 54 methamphetamine lab sites in Oregon in which a child was present, living and breathing the harsh reality of meth production, use and trafficking.

In addition to use, the production of meth has become an increasingly devastating reality for communities throughout the state. From the Portland metropolitan area in the north to Medford in the south, meth labs have sprouted in every corner of Oregon.

But the problem is not merely rooted in our urban areas. Its talons have reached into smaller, more rural regions where ingredients can be found, production is less detectable and there are arterial traffic routes and waterways for distribution.

Perhaps no region in Oregon understands this issue more starkly than Umatilla County. Per capita, Umatilla County has a far greater number of meth lab seizures than any other county in Oregon. Of the 454 methamphetamine labs seized throughout Oregon in 2003, 13% of them were in Umatilla County, an area with only two percent of the state's population. Their portion has jumped to 21% so far this year.

Why is Oregon such a haven for meth production and trafficking?

With rural Oregon's rich base in agriculture comes easy accessibility to anhydrous ammonia, a widely used source of nitrogen for crop production and a key ingredient in the production of meth. The booming housing markets in southern and central Oregon provide manufacturers with plenty of construction sites from which to steal equipment and material for their labs. And Oregon's dense forests, steep mountainsides and sparsely populated regions provide "cooks" with the ability to set up labs in areas that cannot sustain law enforcement crews necessary to root them out.

Additionally, meth manufacturers enjoy interstate highway and waterway systems that give Oregon the unfortunate ability to become a transshipment point of illegal drugs throughout the west. Northeast Oregon has a talented law enforcement team working overtime trying to keep up with all of the activity in the region.

In Oregon's fight against meth, we are fortunate to have the support of educational efforts like Oregon Partnership, an organization that works with community coalitions and schools. Oregon Partnership, under the direction of Chief Executive Officer Judy Cushing, has partnered with local radio and TV stations to publicize the dangers of meth and meth production labs, created public service announcements for media outlets to run, and filmed a documentary targeting teenagers to be shown in schools.

I have written to the chairman of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, State and the Judiciary urging support for funding of the critical methamphetamine prevention program being implemented by Oregon Partnership. They have done a great deal to broaden public awareness about this issue, and for that Oregonians are grateful.

Unfortunately, it is not enough. We must combat this problem from all angles.

As indicated in a bipartisan letter I signed written to the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), I believe that there must be a comprehensive review of the nation's precursor control laws and programs. Additionally, I am supportive of increased funding for the national Drug-Free Communities Act and the National Youth Anti Drug Media Campaign, as written in a letter sent to the chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Treasury and General Government.

The fight against meth is one that must be fought as a nation in order to avoid the nomadic tendencies "cooks" will display when one state has less strict laws than another. However, we must continue local, targeted assistance to those areas most affected.

Oregon is in desperate need of additional assistance for its many communities fighting the battle against methamphetamines. Umatilla County, which faces the worst of our state's meth and marijuana problems, has been denied a High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) designation. I reiterate my request that Umatilla County be designated as a HIDTA given its ideal conditions for production and its proximity to the Columbia River Channel, the Pacific Ocean, Interstate 84, Washington, Idaho, Montana and Canada.

Just a few months ago, Scott Burns, deputy director for the Office of National Drug Control Policy, joined me in Pendleton, Oregon for a meeting with the Blue Mountain Enforcement Narcotics Team (BENT), a coalition of law enforcement officials from Umatilla and surrounding counties working collaboratively to fight our rising drug problem. Sheriff John Trumbo and Sergeant Greg Sherman from Umatilla County, Sheriff Verlin Denton and Sergeant Mark Miller of Morrow County, and others gave a startling description of the scope they face when it comes to the problems of meth, marijuana and other drugs in Eastern Oregon. They are doing a tremendous job and their work is invaluable, but they are stretched far too thin.

Due to BENT's limited financial and human resources, the unit's ability to target mid- and upper-level drug trafficking organizations in the region will continue to be severely constrained without additional help. Increased DEA assistance to the region through the establishment of a permanent field office in Pendleton will provide BENT and other law enforcement entities enhanced abilities to fight the growing problem posed not only by meth, but also marijuana and other drugs.

In order to successfully fight the scourge of methamphetamines, communities – parents, law enforcement, educators, and business leaders – must come together. Preventing both the use and production of meth is paramount to the public safety and health of our schools, cities and states nationwide.

Oregon is working hard to fight this rampant problem facing both urban and rural areas. Mr. Chairman, I look forward to working with you and the rest of our colleagues in Congress to find solutions to this emergency. I also look forward to working with representatives from federal agencies and departments and the terrific people at home in Oregon as we fight to take back our communities from this menacing drug.

Thank you.