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As toll from opioid epidemic climbs, grief turns to action at FED UP! Rally in D.C.

Steve Rummier was a successful financial planner and musician from Minnesota who was about to get married when he died of his addiction to prescription painkillers. Emily Jackson was a Chicago 18-year-old with her whole life ahead of her when she took her uncle's pain medication, unaware of its potential to kill. Michael Israel, formerly of Buffalo, N.Y., was just 20 years old when he shot himself in desperation, unable to kick the painkiller medley that had been prescribed for his Crohn's disease.

The family and friends of Steve, Emily and Michael are among legions who have lost loved ones to the nation's painkiller and heroin epidemic, which now kills more than 16,600 a year. They are bereaved, anguished, and broken-hearted.

They are also **FED UP!**

In a call to action, hundreds will rally Tuesday October 1, noon to 2 p.m., in Upper Senate Park in Washington, D.C.

"Over the past decade more than 125,000 Americans have lost their lives from opioid painkiller overdoses," said Dr. Andrew Kolodny, chief medical officer at Phoenix House and President of Physicians for Responsible Opioid Prescribing. "This is the worst drug epidemic in U.S. history, yet the response from some federal agencies has been weak and tragically ineffective."

Rally organizers and participants are calling for immediate, coordinated and comprehensive federal action to end the epidemic, including moving hydrocodone products from Schedule III to Schedule II and ensuring that the millions of people who have become addicted are able to access effective treatment.

Among the speakers will be U.S. Sens. Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Charles Schumer of New York and U.S. Rep. Hal Rogers of Kentucky. All are leaders in advocating for federal action to end the epidemic of opioid addiction and overdose deaths.

The FED UP! Rally also will feature the voices of many who have lost loved ones to the epidemic. Here are just a few of them.

Judy Rummler, mother of Steve: After our son died, we found a note among his things in which he wrote of his struggle with chronic pain and his addiction to the prescribed medications that were supposed to help him. The note said: 'At first it was a lifeline. Now it is a noose around my neck.' We are determined to fight for changes that will protect other families from the heartbreak we have experienced."

Peter Jackson, father of Emily: "The stunning correlation between the sales of opioids and overdose deaths, and the quadrupling of both in the past decade, implicates overprescribing as the primary cause of the opioid epidemic. We are losing our loved ones because the medical community and the public are underestimating risks. The reality is that one pill can kill."

Avi Israel, father of Michael: "My son was taking Vicodin prescribed to him with refills by a doctor who thought he was helping him. It's the most abused prescription drug in the country but the FDA allows it to remain in a category for drugs with low abuse potential. And the FDA refuses to cooperate with other government agencies that want to fix this problem. My son and many others might be alive today if the FDA had done its job."

The October 1 FED UP! Rally has the backing of a broad coalition of advocacy organizations and foundations from across the United States. Sponsors of the event include Transforming Youth Recovery, Physicians for Responsible Opioid Prescribing, Phoenix House, Gosnold on Cape Cod, Hazelden, and Father Martin's Ashley.

Media Contact: Judy Rummler, Chair, FED UP! Rally Steering Committee

612-865-1754 (cell)

judy@steverummlerhopefoundation.org

feduprally@comcast.net

Webpage: <http://feduprally.eventbrite.com>