KEN HAL: PATRICK MORRISEY SOLD US OUT

By Ken Hall

Published July 18, 2019, Charleston Gazette-Mail

There has never been any doubt that the opioid epidemic has ravaged the state of West Virginia. Now newly uncovered evidence proves what we already know. Thanks to a year’s long fight by the Charleston Gazette-Mail’s parent company and The Washington Post, a database of information regarding the opioid industry from 2006 through 2012 has been released to the public. That data shows an even more distressing picture about where the deadly pills went and who supplied them.

In all, during the seven years included in the data, more than 76 billion opioid pills were flooded into the United States. This comes as no surprise to all of the West Virginians who have been touched by this deadly epidemic through the death of a loved one, the grandparents raising their grandchildren, the overly stressed public health system and those working in law enforcement.

On a per capita basis, from 2006 through 2012, West Virginia received 67 pills per person annually, paving the way for our state to have the highest per capita death rate from opioids in the country.

As with the tobacco industry, the lawsuits against pharmaceutical companies are piling up. There are currently more than 1,500 lawsuits against two dozen pharmaceutical companies that have been consolidated in a court in Ohio. Oklahoma, which received 54 pills per person per year, recently settled a lawsuit with Purdue Pharma for $270 million. The state also settled with Teva Pharmaceuticals for $85 million.

Contrast the Oklahoma settlements with those agreed to by West Virginia Attorney General Patrick Morrisey. According to the newly uncovered data, McKesson Corporation was the single largest distributor of opioids nationwide, distributing more than 14 billion pills during the seven year period covered in the data. Yet Morrisey accepted a paltry $37 million settlement with the company. Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va.,
referred to the settlement as a “sweetheart deal” that amounts to “pennies on the dollar to what McKesson cost our state.”

He also settled with Cardinal Health, a company that distributed 10.7 billion pills during the seven year period, for a mere $20 million. He settled with Amerisource Bergen for only $16 million even though they distributed 8.9 billion pills during the same time period. Given the new information, Morrisey’s settlements are an embarrassment.

The American Enterprise Institute estimates that the opioid epidemic is costing West Virginia $8.8 billion a year. When former Attorney General Darrell McGraw originally filed the lawsuits, he intended to get justice for the people of West Virginia. So why did Patrick Morrisey settle the cases he inherited with these companies for so little?

It might have something to do with his ties to Big Pharma. Before becoming Attorney General, Patrick Morrisey lobbied on behalf of an industry association that listed Cardinal Health, the third-largest opioid distributor, among its members. Morrisey’s wife is a lobbyist and partner of a Washington D.C. lobbying firm that represents many health care industry clients. In fact, she was a lobbyist for Cardinal Health from 1999 through 2016, while Cardinal was saturating West Virginia with deadly, addictive drugs.

Patrick Morrisey’s meager settlements with some of the companies responsible for the current public health crisis will do little to clean up the mess they created. They are an annoyance at best to these multi-million dollar corporations and won’t make a dent in the annual $8.8 billion that West Virginia has to shell out to try to deal with this preventable public health crisis. Morrisey sold us out. West Virginians deserve better.