

# Trump's opioid plan to take three-pronged approach, including death penalty for high-volume drug dealers

(CNN) President Donald Trump will roll out new plans to tackle the country's opioid epidemic on Monday in New Hampshire, the White House said Sunday. The plan will include stiffer penalties for high-intensity drug traffickers, including the death penalty for some dealers, Andrew Bremberg, director of the White House Domestic Policy Council, told reporters Sunday.

Trump's long-awaited plan will focus on three areas: Law enforcement and interdiction, prevention and education through a sizable advertising campaign,, improving the ability to fund treatment through the federal government, and help those impacted by the epidemic find jobs while fighting addiction, Bremberg and White House counselor Kellyanne Conway said.

Congress recently appropriated \$6 billion to combat the opioid epidemic, and a senior administration official told CNN that Trump's plan will lay out how the administration believes that money should be spent.

The concept of the death penalty for certain drug traffickers is something Trump has been outspoken about, but this will be the first time it will be part of an official administration plan.

"The Department of Justice will seek the death penalty against drug traffickers when it's appropriate under current law," Bremberg told reporters during a phone call Sunday evening.

Trump called for the death penalty to drug dealers earlier this month at a rally in Pennsylvania. His plan is expected to focus on sentencing reforms for drug dealers that would stiffen penalties for high-intensity drug dealers while "other people languishing in prison for these low-level drug crimes," a senior administration official said.

“The President thinks that the punishment doesn’t fit the crime,” the official said, adding that these penalties would be for dealers who bring large quantities of opioids — particular fentanyl — into the United States, not the people that are “are growing pot in the backyard or a friend who has a low-level possession crime.

“His plan will address, and he will address, the stiffening of penalties for the people who are bringing the poison into our communities,” the official added.

The official stressed that the speech and plan are still being reviewed and subject to change, meaning how much Trump focuses on the death penalty and tougher punishment is still uncertain.



CNN Exclusive: The more opioids doctors prescribe, the more money they make

On Sunday’s call with reporters, administration officials would not get into specifics on Trump’s death penalty proposal and referred all questions to the Department of Justice. When asked if the death penalty would be an appropriate punishment for some traffickers, a senior administration official again referred the question to the department but said capital punishment would be fitting in some instances.

The official said the death penalty proposal would be something the Justice Department will be “examining to move ahead with to make sure that’s done appropriately” and not wait for Congress to propose possible legislation on the matter.

In support of the proposal, Trump told an audience in Pennsylvania this month that “a drug dealer will kill 2,000, 3,000, 5,000 people during the course of his or her life” and not be punished as much as a murderer.

“Thousands of people are killed or their lives are destroyed, their families are destroyed. So you can kill thousands of people and go to jail for 30 days,” Trump said. “They catch a drug dealer, they don’t even put them in jail.”

Trump then touted the way Singapore handled drug dealers with the death penalty.

“That means if we catch a drug dealer, death penalty,” Trump said.

Trump’s talk of stricter penalties for drug crimes has worried some treatment advocates, who have said there is no way the United States can punish its way out of the opioid epidemic.



ER visits for opioid overdose up 30%, CDC study finds

The New Hampshire event will bring both the President and first lady to the key presidential campaign state for the first time since Trump won the presidency in 2016. The state has been an epicenter in the fight against opioids and Trump’s focus on the scourge came from events he headlined in the state where he heard about the epidemic.

Recently released numbers from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that around 64,000 people died from drug overdoses in 2016. And since 1999, the number of American overdose deaths involving opioids has quadrupled.

Trump’s plan is also expected to include a federally backed ad campaign to prevent people from considering using opioids.

Trump and first lady Melania Trump, who will attend the event in New Hampshire on Monday, have worked together on the ad campaign, the official said, noting that the issue is “really the only policy issue the two of them have tackled together.”

As for the ad campaign, both are coming at it differently, the official said.

“The first lady wants to focus on the well-being of children with ads that lay out you are a somebody, not a statistic, don’t start with drugs, and educate them,” the official said. “The President is more shock the conscience. He wants to shock people into not using it.”

Trump previously proposed an ad campaign to help curb opioid abuse last year.

In addition to the first lady, several members of Trump’s Cabinet are expected to attend the New Hampshire event with the President, the official said.

The Trump administration’s effort has internally been led by Conway, the President’s senior aide, but has also included conversations with a series of other agencies, including the departments of Labor, Housing and Urban Development, and State.

“We call it the ‘crisis next door’ because everyone knows someone,” Conway told reporters Sunday night. “It is no longer somebody else’s community, somebody else’s kid, somebody else’s co-worker. The opioid crisis is viewed by us at the White House as a nonpartisan problem searching for a bipartisan solution.”

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