

# Trump calls for execution of drug dealers at Pennsylvania rally

**Nick Barrickman****12 March 2018**

In a Saturday campaign rally in the suburbs of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Republican president Donald Trump called for the execution of convicted drug dealers. This call came at a rally for a Republican congressional candidate in a district heavily affected by the closure of steel mills and the ravages of a drug epidemic that has claimed the lives of thousands in working-class communities.

“Do you think the drug dealers who kill thousands of people during their lifetime, do you think they care who’s on a blue-ribbon committee?” the president rhetorically asked his audience. He continued, “The only way to solve the drug problem is through toughness... I don’t think we should play games.”

Trump compared the supposedly lenient drug laws in the United States to the “zero tolerance” laws existing in countries such as Singapore and China, saying “I think it’s a discussion we have to start thinking about. I don’t know if we’re ready—I don’t know if this country’s ready for it.”

Trump made similar comments at a White House summit late last month, presenting the execution of drug traffickers as a means of stemming the opioid epidemic. The *Washington Post* reported Friday that the White House was considering a new policy to allow prosecutors the right to pursue the death penalty against convicted drug dealers.

Trump’s statements come amid a rapidly expanding social crisis, in which over 64,000 Americans lost their lives to a drug overdose in 2016, the last year for which statistics are available. Despite the recommendations of a six-member, bipartisan commission established last March, the Trump administration has produced nothing to address the social devastation which is responsible for the crisis. Instead, the president has relied increasingly on authoritarian and police-state measures.

In January, Democratic Representative Patrick Kennedy, a member of Trump’s commission, stated the president’s work on the drug crisis has been a “charade.” But the Democrats have generally gone along with the pretense of action, praising Trump’s declaration of a 90-day “national emergency” even though it was backed by little new funding. The Trump administration’s proposed budget slashes funding for mental health and drug treatment.

Rather than supplying funds for drug treatment, counseling and other life-saving measures, the Trump administration has sought to curtail access. In January, Seema Verma, Trump’s administrator for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) unveiled plans to introduce work requirements for low income recipients of Medicaid, which would cut drug treatments for the poor and unemployed.

The viciousness of the Trump administration’s pursuit of low-level drug offenders is matched perhaps only by its hypocrisy. In October, Trump was forced to withdraw his nomination of Pennsylvania Republican Representative Tom Marino to head the federal Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) after it was revealed that the congressman had spearheaded efforts to cripple the agency’s ability to regulate the pharmaceutical industry’s dispersal of cheap prescription painkillers.

Unsurprisingly, Trump’s recent comments calling for the death of drug peddlers who “kill 5,000 people with drugs ... [and] are making a lot of money” were not a reference to the big-shot criminals, the CEOs and major stockholders of the pharmaceutical manufacturers and distribution companies, but rather to the street-level drug sellers who are the retail minions of the corporate bosses.

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