

Death Penalty for Drug Dealers? Be Careful What You Wish For, President Trump

In his first 2020 re-election campaign appearance in New Hampshire, US president Donald Trump addressed some of his typical bombast to the so-called “opioid crisis.” “If we don’t get tough on the drug dealers, ” said Trump, “we’re wasting our time. That toughness includes the death penalty.”

An odd take, considering that one of Trump’s few worthwhile campaign promises was to leave the legal status of marijuana up to the states. That promise should have been kept, and extended to other drugs as well. Instead, he turned Jeff “good people don’t smoke marijuana” Sessions loose as Attorney General, to the country’s injury.

Even more odd, coming as it does from a high-level drug dealer like Donald Trump.

You know, the owner of Trump Winery. And, as of his 2016 campaign financial disclosures, a shareholder in multiple conspiracies to manufacture and traffic in drugs (including opiates) — to wit, Pfizer, Merck, Celgene, and GlaxoSmithKline.

Then again, maybe it’s not so odd. As a major league drug dealer, perhaps Trump is taking his cue from the murderous cartels of Colombia and Mexico. Now that he has the entirety of federal law enforcement and the US armed forces at his beck and call, why not just kill his competitors? Pablo Trumpobar, anyone? El Trumpo?

Or perhaps the sentiment is genuine and he intends, as soon as he gets enabling legislation for the scheme, to turn himself in, plead guilty, don coveralls matching his complexion, and put in one of those legendary McDonald’s orders for his last meal.

Either way, it’s a monumentally stupid idea.

First of all, the War on Drugs is over and drugs won. Continuing to pretend otherwise is just a novel way of setting taxpayer money on fire, a featherbedding scheme for law enforcement. People who want drugs are going to get drugs whether drugs are legal or not. Trump doesn’t have to like it. That’s how it is whether he likes it or not.

Secondly, the main effect of imposing the death penalty for dealing in drugs would be an increase in the general level of mayhem and murder relating to the drug trade. If you’re a drug dealer and already up for the death penalty, why not go ahead and kill anyone who gets in your way — competitors, cops, accidental witnesses, customers you suspect of being informants, etc.? It’s not like they can execute you twice, right? It won’t take long for drug dealers who think that way to replace (posthumously, of course) drug dealers who don’t.

That's the pragmatic case against Trump's proposal. The moral case is that both drug prohibition and capital punishment are irredeemably evil big-government crimes against humanity. Worse crimes, by far, than Trump's own drug dealing activities.