

AlterNet

These MAGA Republicans are determined to expand the failed drug war: report

Alex Henderson

June 12, 2023

Critics of the War on Drugs are found all over the political spectrum, from Black Lives Matter to the [libertarian Cato Institute](#) and former Rep. [Ron Paul](#) (R-Texas). And those critics cite a long list of reasons why it has been an abysmal failure, including mass incarceration, the militarization of police and innocent victims killed during botched [no-knock drug raids](#).

In California, the War on Drugs did a lot to increase the prison population and promote the [growth of prison gangs](#) such as the Aryan Brotherhood and the Mexican Mafia. But for all the draconian sentences, overcrowded prisons and militarized drug raids¹, hard drug use hasn't gone away; addicts have been flocking to [Philadelphia's Kensington](#) and Boston's so-called "[Methadone Mile](#)" in huge numbers.

In a [scathing report for The New Republic](#) published on June 11, journalist Ana Marie Cox describes the ways in which Republicans in Florida and Texas are trying to expand the War on Drugs.

"The Texas governor has pledged to sign a recently passed bill that would reclassify overdoses as 'poisonings,' clearing the way for murder charges against anyone who provides a lethal dose — whether that provider was a friend, dealer, or person who happened to be in the same room," [Cox explains](#). "Still seeking top place in the cruelty contest, Florida passed a law allowing prosecutors to seek the death penalty for drug-induced homicide, or DIH, cases — again regardless of the supplier's role. The Florida law also opens a new front in the criminalization of being around drugs: A non-fatal overdose could catch the supplier a second-degree felony."

Former President Donald Trump has been campaigning on [expanding the death penalty](#) to include drug trafficking. Trump proposed, "We're going to be asking everyone who sells drugs, gets caught selling drugs, to receive the death penalty for their heinous acts. Because it's the only way."

[Cox notes](#) that in February, some GOP senators — including Florida's Marco Rubio, Texas' Ted Cruz and Missouri's Josh Hawley — "reintroduced legislation to treat distributing fentanyl that results in an overdose as a first-degree felony murder."

"In practice," [Cox observes](#), "such laws look like this: [Three Memphis teens](#) overdosed in the parking lot of a high school, hours before graduation. One 17-year-old survived. She's been

charged with second-degree murder. In Texas, at least two counties appear to have taken Abbott's endorsement of the coming state law as license to go ahead and use traditional murder statutes against teenagers for selling drugs to other teens."

These laws, Cox emphasizes, ignore the fact that "arresting your way out of a drug problem has never worked."

"Lord knows, if it worked, given the number of Americans arrested in this war, we would know that by now," the journalist argues. "But it doesn't. You just wind up with more poor people, non-white people, and addicts in prison, which — ah, I see. That might be the point.