

# Press Releases: Briefing by Deputy Assistant Secretary Jim Walsh On the State Department's Role in Combating the Opioid Crisis

Special Briefing

Jim Walsh, Deputy Assistant Secretary for International Narcotics And Law Enforcement Affairs

Press Briefing Room

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**MS NAUERT:** Glad to have you here. Everybody, thanks so much for coming. I brought a few extra guests with me today as a part of our effort to try to bring more of our experts into the room to provide you information on timely issues. I just want to add on a personal note to that my colleagues who are joining us have served at the State Department for 15 and 17 years, respectively. They are both Civil servants who have done tremendous work on behalf of the department and the American public.

We have a tremendous amount of respect for both our functional and regional bureaus, our Foreign Service officers, our career Civil servants, and I want

to highlight some of the excellent work that they are doing. They are tremendous patriots. They have served all around the world – many of them have – and are really example of State Department’s best and brightest.

I’d like to start by introducing you today to Jim Walsh. He is the deputy assistant secretary for a bureau which is called INL. You probably heard the President a short while ago talk about the opioid crisis here in the United States. The President talked about how, through a whole-of-government approach, we will aggressively fight the addiction throughout the administration – the addiction crisis in the United States.

The President said we can be an end – a generation to end this epidemic. The State Department is also doing its part in trying to do away with the problem of drug addiction and all of that. We play a key role in combatting the deadly epidemic. Our bureau dedicated to drugs and law enforcement, INL, is leading efforts around the globe related to the opioids crisis, so to provide some details on this and answer your questions on the issue, I’d like to welcome to the podium our Deputy Assistant Secretary Jim Walsh from the INL Bureau. That stands for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement. He has a quick address for you. We’ll take a few questions, and then I’d like to introduce you to another one of our deputy assistant secretaries.

**MR WALSH:** Thank you, Heather. Good afternoon, everyone. With the President and First Lady just speaking about our nation’s drug crisis, I’d like to share a few comments about how the State Department is addressing the opioid epidemic. With heroin and synthetic opioids fueling this crisis produced overseas, transnational criminal organizations moving this deadly product, our national strategy to respond to this crisis must include an international component. Responding to this crisis is a top priority for the administration, and here at the State Department we’re leveraging our partnerships across the globe to stem the flow of these killer drugs. We’re pulling diplomatic levers both bilaterally and multilaterally, and using foreign assistance to protect U.S. communities.

Effective October 18th, criminals now have a tougher time producing fentanyl because two major ingredients needed to produce this dangerous drug are now internationally controlled. The State Department led a robust diplomatic campaign to advocate for this result, which culminated in a unanimous international vote to impose the new restrictions. This is just one important step in our efforts to reduce the supply of deadly synthetic opioids and ultimately help save American lives.

On the other side of the globe we are working with China. We are encouraging China to continue to crack down on illegal production and trafficking of synthetic opioids. We have made notable progress on this front to date. In March and July 2017, in response to U.S. requests, China agreed to establish new controls on five dangerous synthetic drugs, including carfentanyl, which you may know is a hundred times more deadly and potent than fentanyl. Next week the State Department, along with our interagency partners at the Department of Justice, will travel to China to take part in a recurring experts-level counternarcotics working group meeting to further expand this cooperation.

We are also using foreign assistance to strengthen Mexico's ability to stop illicit drugs from reaching our border. The INL Bureau efforts on the ground, including building Mexico's capacity to interdict illegal drugs, improves security along our southwest border and reduced production of heroin and synthetic drugs, and we will take down clandestine drug labs. On December 1st we'll gather again with not only Mexico but our northern partner, Canada, who is facing its own serious fentanyl challenge. This will take place at the next North American Drug Dialogue.

Beyond the supply work – supply-side work, our international drug demand reduction programs are discovering new approaches that are being adopted by U.S., state, and local prevention and treatment professionals. INL has developed a scientifically grounded, evidence-based, universal curriculum for both treatment and prevention. This will head off and break the chain of addiction in a more effective manner. Our overseas demand reduction tools and global research will also help address the opioid crisis domestically.

The bottom line is this: We at the State Department are moving forward and are full aware of the gravity of this crisis. With over 64,000 Americans dead from overdoses in 2016, with drug traffickers taking advantage of new ways to move and sell their product, including through the dark web, and rogue chemists developing assiduous new synthetic drugs at an alarming rate, we must constantly be adapting our approach in responding to new and deadly realities.

This challenge is a dire one, and it will continue to be a top priority for the department.

Thank you. I'll take a few questions.

**MS NAUERT:** Who would like to start? Come on, no one's curious in this room? You're reporters.

**QUESTION:** I'll do it.

**MS NAUERT:** Okay.

**QUESTION:** All right.

**MS NAUERT:** Said, is that you?

**QUESTION:** I'll take a shot at it. How are you coordinating your effort with, let's say, countries such as your allies like Egypt and so on, where there is an emerging problem similar to yours?

**MR WALSH:** Sure. We – as I said, we work in the multilateral and bilateral arena. Through the international multilateral arena, we meet on a regular basis in the International Narcotics Control Board, and we also work in a bilateral through our embassies. Through our Drug Demand Reduction Programs, we're also collecting a lot of information to gather an appreciation of how dangerous this – fentanyl, in particular, is occurring throughout the world. Our statistics are not there, but it is – we are getting evidence that it is reaching a lot of other countries as well. And so through the collection of

information and sharing of our techniques for drug demand reduction, we're working with them.

**QUESTION:** Would that be security agency-to-security agency coordination, or at the diplomatic level? How is –

**MR WALSH:** Mostly diplomatic, with Egypt in particular.

**MS NAUERT:** We'll take one more question. Go ahead.

**QUESTION:** Thank you so much. Regarding the – Carmen Ria Rodriguez, Radio Marti. Would you say that it's coming from abroad, or is this home-elaborated? What would the major supplier be?

**MR WALSH:** The major supply of the heroin, as you heard from our President, is coming from Mexico, in fact. DEA estimates about 90 percent. Of the fentanyl, the vast majority of it does come from China. And we – what we are seeing is that it's either being trafficked through Mexico and being combined with the heroin, or it's being directly shipped to the United States via mail.

**MS NAUERT:** Thank you so much.

**MR WALSH:** Thank you.

**MS NAUERT:** Thank you, sir. Appreciate it. And thank you for your expertise and your time. Glad to have you.

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