

Drug policy shifting toward treatment over jail

By Katie Zezima, Washington Post

Over the past few years, the White House has shifted its drug policy away from putting low-level offenders in jail and prison and toward helping them access addiction treatment – an approach that dovetails with the life of acting drug czar Michael Botticelli, a recovering alcoholic.

It's a strategy has a rare distinction nowadays: it has been embraced by both Republicans and Democrats.

As the nation grapples with fresh waves of prescription drug and heroin abuse, members of both parties are calling for a shift away from using the criminal justice system to address the problem, and toward public health-based approach to drug addiction.

"You just can't bust enough people to solve this problem," Republican Ohio Gov. John Kasich said in January. Drug overdose deaths in Ohio increased by 366 percent from 2000 to 2014. "The problem has to be solved at the beginning, which is to keep people from getting involved with these drugs."

Why are politicians of all persuasions calling for treatment-oriented solutions?

The biggest reason: the spike in drug overdoses isn't dropping and public opinion has increasingly tilted toward providing treatment to people with addiction issues.

A survey released in April by the Pew Research Center found an overwhelming majority of Americans believe the government's approach to drug policy should focus on treatment.

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