

Vowing to tame opioids

Trump speaks at anti-drug event, touts border wall

The Associated Press

ATLANTA — President Donald Trump pledged on Wednesday to battle the deadly epidemic of opioid drug abuse “until our job is done,” and he claimed progress even though it is unclear whether the crisis has diminished.

Trump spoke at an annual conference of health, law enforcement, elected and other officials who work to combat drug abuse and addiction, and used the appearance to advocate for the wall he wants to build on the U.S.-Mexico border, saying without evidence that it will help keep drugs out of the United States. His wife, Melania, introduced him.

“My administration is deploying every resource at our disposal to empower you, to support you and to fight right by your side,” Trump said. “We will not solve this epidemic overnight but ... there’s just nothing

going to stop us, no matter how you cut it.”

Before leaving the White House for the Atlanta event, Trump claimed credit for progress in combating the drug scourge.

“It’s a big problem. It’s a big addiction and we’re handling it,” the president told reporters. He said doctors, laboratories, clinics and drug companies have assisted the administration.

There have been signs of progress, including a drop in the number of prescriptions for opioid painkillers. However, opioid abuse claimed a record of nearly 48,000 American lives in 2017. An estimated 2 million people are addicted to the drugs, which include both legal prescription pain medications and illegal drugs such as heroin.

While prescription opioids initially accounted for most deaths, the epidemic is now driven by illicit heroin and fentanyl. Those two drugs were implicated in the vast majority of opioid overdoses reported in 2017, according to federal figures.

Keith Humphreys, a drug policy adviser to presidents from both political parties, said



President Donald Trump and first lady Melania Trump wrap up an appearance at the conference.

some states and communities are making headway, but not because of action by Trump. Humphreys said other states have regressed.

Trump said the administration has committed \$6 billion to combat the crisis, set aside money to prevent youth substance abuse, and increased the distribution of the overdose-reversing drug naloxone.

“Pretty amazing stuff,” the president remarked.

Efforts to curb opioid use are being undertaken by an array of government agencies. Trump said states are now allowed to use Medicaid dollars to pay for residential treatment facilities, expanding access to care. He said the Department

of Veterans Affairs has greatly reduced the number of veterans being treated with opioids.

Trump also discussed law enforcement efforts, including shutting down online criminal drug-selling networks and more aggressive efforts to seize illegal drugs and stop immigrants from entering the country without authorization.

He said that almost 400 miles of wall will be in place along the border with Mexico by the end of 2020 and that it “will have a tremendous impact on drugs coming into our country.”

Trump’s statement contradicts a 2018 report by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration that cites common drug smuggling methods that would

not be choked off by a border wall; the most common trafficking technique is to hide the drugs in passenger vehicles or tractor-trailers as they drive into the U.S. at official crossings.

The first lady spoke briefly about her visits to hospitals and treatment centers and her meetings with doctors and nurses as part of her own campaign to highlight the “terrible toll the opioid epidemic is having on children and young mothers.”

“My husband is here today because he cares deeply about what you’re doing to help the millions of Americans affected by the opioid epidemic,” she said.

CDC: Most measles cases in U.S. since '94

The Associated Press

Measles in the United States has climbed to its highest level in 25 years, closing in on 700 cases this year in a resurgence largely attributed to misinformation that is turning parents against vaccines.

“This is alarming,” said Dr. William Schaffner, a Vanderbilt University vaccine expert. Not only is measles dangerous in itself, but its return could mean other vaccine-preventable dis-

eases seemingly consigned to the past may be coming back as well, he said.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said 695 cases had been reported in 22 states this year as of Wednesday. That makes this the nation’s worst year for measles since 1994. There were 963 cases in 1994.

Roughly three-quarters of this year’s illnesses in the United States have been in New York state, mainly in two ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities in Brooklyn and Rockland County. Most of those cases have been in unvaccinated people.

Ultra-Orthodox rabbis generally have no religious objections to vaccines and have urged their followers to get inoculated. But the “anti-vaxxer” movement has made inroads

among the ultra-Orthodox.

“There’s a lot of misinformation from this anti-vaccine movement within the community. Some of the misinformation is that it causes autism, that the vaccines contain mercury, that the disease, itself will protect them from cancer, eczema,” said Dr. Joseph Kaplovitz, a pediatrician who serves the ultra-Orthodox community in Brooklyn’s Williamsburg neighborhood.

The number of cases is likely to go even higher. Measles is

highly contagious and can spread through the air when someone coughs or sneezes.

The CDC recommends the vaccine for everyone over a year old, except for people who had the disease as children. Those who have had it are immune. The vaccine, which became available in the 1960s, is considered safe and effective, and because of it, measles was declared all but eliminated in the United States in 2000. It has come back since then, including 667 cases in 2014.

