

Trump pledges to commute sentence of Silk Road founder Ross Ulbricht if elected

By Peder Schaefer 05/25/2024 11:14 PM EDT Link Copied : 2-3 minutes

Former President Donald Trump arrives to deliver remarks during the Libertarian National Convention on May 25, 2024, at the Washington Hilton in Washington. | Francis Chung/POLITICO

Donald Trump promised to commute the sentence of Ross Ulbricht, the founder of the online illegal drug marketplace Silk Road, in a raucous speech before the Libertarian National Convention on Saturday night.

“And if you vote for me, on Day One, I will commute the sentence of Ross Ulbricht,” the former president said, generating cheers from the audience, moments after mentioning his plans to pardon supporters who stormed the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.

Trump's promise came during a speech designed to make overtures to Libertarian voters, who argue for the legalization of drugs and have long lobbied for the release of Ulbricht. Supporters of Ulbricht distributed hundreds of black and white signs that read “Free Ross” to the crowd, and Libertarians waved them manically in the moments after Trump's announcement.

“It's one of the things we wanted from his first term,” said Katherine Yeniscavich, a national committee member of the party.

“He wants Libertarian voters, and if he agreed to free Ross he would get a lot of votes,” she said before his speech.

Ulbricht has been imprisoned since 2013, and some libertarians say his case is an example of government overreach and the need for criminal justice reforms. Ulbricht's case was one of the top issues that libertarians asked Trump to address before the convention — and it won Trump his biggest applause of the night.

In another olive branch to the third party, Trump said he would put a Libertarian in his cabinet if elected, and would also place Libertarians in “senior posts” in his administration.

But despite those promises, Trump received sustained boos and jeers from the crowd throughout his speech, suggesting the pledge to pardon Ulbricht may not be enough.

Billy Hunt, a Libertarian Party delegate from Rhode Island, said that while he appreciated the gesture from Trump, it wouldn't change his vote.

“I'm happy he said that,” Hunt said. “But it's not changing the needle.”