

NATIONAL

NEWSCAST

LIVE RADIO

SHOWS

Ala. Attorney General Talks About Late Wife's Mental Health And Dependence Struggles

June 28, 2018 · 1:47 PM ET

AMY HELD



Alabama Attorney General Steve Marshall, pictured earlier this month on Capitol Hill, spoke Wednesday about the recent suicide of his wife after a long struggle with depression, chronic pain and opioid dependence.

J. Scott Applewhite/AP

"This is tough," Attorney General of Alabama Steve Marshall said through tears on Wednesday as he stood at the lectern of his hometown Baptist church in rural Alabama, facing news cameras and dozens of people, three days after the sudden death of his wife, Bridgette Marshall, 45.

The cause, Marshall said, was suicide. But that was not his focus.

"What we want to be able to focus on is the story of her life," he said flanked by family members, who sometimes stood with their heads bowed, quietly crying.

Posted by [al.com](#)
95,233 Views

In fact, he said he was "forced to be here today" after his family had come across news accounts describing his wife's death Sunday in Tennessee.

Marshall said those reports angered him. But then he and his family came to a realization.

"Maybe being transparent about how we got to the point where we did last Sunday could be helpful," he said. "Because we know that we are not the only family that has had to deal with a family member who's suffered from mental health issues. And we know that Bridgette is not the only person that ever considered suicide."

Marshall began by describing his wife's suffering from debilitating migraines from an early age.

She sought medical help and was eventually prescribed Oxycodone, then Fentanyl — "an amazingly powerful drug," he said.

"And Bridgette became dependent."

Again, she sought help and went to inpatient treatment.

"But even to the time of her death, (she) did not always handle her medication the way that she should," Marshall said. "It's one reason why, professionally you hear me talk about opioids, it's personal."

Marshall serves as co-chair of Governor Kay Ivey's Opioid Overdose and Addiction Council.

In recent years, Alabama has ranked first in the nation per capita for opioid prescriptions. In 2016, there were 121 prescriptions per 100 people, according to a council report. That's more than one prescription for every man, woman and child in Alabama.

The Council — and Marshall — are working to stem those numbers through a multi-pronged approach that includes prevention, treatment and community response.

Still, as the report concedes, substance abuse disorders are complex.

"I've lived it and I've watched it and I've seen how it has destroyed her in many ways," he said of his wife's battle.

Under the Trump administration, the Department of Justice has made the national opioid epidemic a centerpiece issue.



LAW

Federal Prosecutor Takes On New Case As DOJ Point Person For Opioid Crisis

On Thursday, Attorney General Jeff Sessions announced progress the DOJ has made in a nation-wide "opioid takedown" related to health care fraud.

Since January 2017, more than 400 doctors and other medical personnel have been charged with opioid-related crimes, according to Sessions. 16 of those doctors

prescribed more than 20.3 million pills illegally.

Marshall did not go into details about his wife's history of opioid use.

The Centers for Disease Control notes that substance abuse can be a contributing factor to suicide.

Earlier this month, the CDC released stark figures about suicide, saying rates have risen in nearly every state in recent years.

Some 45 thousand people lost their lives to suicide in 2016.

Recent high-profile deaths ruled as suicides, including chef and television host Anthony Bourdain and designer Kate Spade, have also brought the issue to the forefront.

"Mental health conditions are often seen as the cause of suicide," the CDC said, "but suicide is rarely caused by any single factor."

In fact, many people who have taken their own lives had no diagnosed mental health conditions, according to the CDC.

Marshall said his wife also, "suffered from a depressive disorder and anxiety."

He said that because she was anxious, being in the public eye was difficult and he wondered whether things would have been different if he hadn't become Attorney General.

"I will be haunted (by) that for the rest of my life," he said.

Bridgette Gentry Marshall was born June 6, 1973, in Boaz, AL, according to the obituary on the McRae Funeral Home's web site.

She was a homemaker and worked as a hospice volunteer.

The funeral is scheduled for Friday.

Marshall said he felt compelled to make public the story of a woman who never wanted to be a public figure.

"And we don't share that lightly, because it's the most personal secret this family has," he said.

"It is our hope today to share our story to also give strength to those families who have endured what we have endured, and maybe for that person who felt like (doing what) Bridgette did on Sunday morning, to know that there is hope and that there are people that love them."



AG Steve Marshall
@AGSteveMarshall

STATEMENT FROM THE OFFICE OF ALABAMA ATTORNEY GENERAL: We are saddened to report that Bridgette Marshall, wife of Attorney General Steve Marshall, passed away this morning after a long struggle with mental illness. (1 of 2)

12:53 PM - Jun 24, 2018

181 168 people are talking about this



AG Steve Marshall
@AGSteveMarshall

Bridgette was a devoted and much beloved daughter, wife and mother. We ask that the people of Alabama keep the Marshall family in their prayers during this most difficult time. (2 of 2)

12:54 PM - Jun 24, 2018

189 91 people are talking about this

If you or someone you know may be considering suicide, contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 (En Español: 1-888-628-9454; Deaf and Hard of Hearing: 1-800-799-4889) or the Crisis Text Line by texting 741741.

Get The Stories That Grabbed Us This Week

Illuminating storytelling, deep investigations, intriguing discoveries - these are the NPR stories you don't want to miss.

SUBSCRIBE

By subscribing, you agree to NPR's terms of use and privacy policy.

More Stories From NPR



WORLD

VIDEO: 10-Year-Old 'DJ Switch' From Ghana Will Melt Your Heart



NATIONAL

Capital Gazette Keeps Working, And Publishing, After 5 Die In Newsroom Shooting

Popular on NPR.org



MOVIE REVIEWS

'Three Identical Strangers': Nuanced Doc Tells A Gripping Tale — In Triplicate



LAW

Supreme Court Says Texas Political Map Is Largely Not A Racial Gerrymander



WORLD

'Canadians Are Livid' About Trump And Are Hitting Back By Boycotting U.S. Goods



MUSIC NEWS

Ed Sheeran Sued For \$100 Million Over Supposed Song Similarity

NPR Editors' Picks



POLITICS

What Happened With Merrick Garland In 2016 And Why It Matters Now



POLITICS

As Secret Money Surges In Elections, The FEC Considers A Small Step For Transparency



WORLD

EU Leaders Reach Agreement On Migrant Crisis



TV REVIEWS

'A Very English Scandal' Is Vedly, Vedly Fun, Indeed

READ & LISTEN

[Home](#)

[News](#)

[Arts & Life](#)

[Music](#)

[Podcasts](#)

[Programs](#)

ABOUT NPR

[Overview](#)

[Finances](#)

[People](#)

[Press](#)

[Ombudsman](#)

[Corrections](#)

CONNECT

[Newsletters](#)

[Facebook](#)

[Twitter](#)

[Instagram](#)

[Contact](#)

[Help](#)

GET INVOLVED

[Support Public Radio](#)

[Sponsor NPR](#)

[NPR Careers](#)

[NPR Shop](#)

[NPR Events](#)

[Visit NPR](#)

[terms of use](#)

[privacy](#)

[sponsorship choices](#)

[text only](#)

© 2018 npr