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State AG responds to concerns from Rotary Club members about opioid epidemic

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Alabama Attorney General Steve Marshall speaks to the Rotary Club of Auburn on Wednesday at Saughatchee Country Club.

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The opioid epidemic is a discussion taking place on both national and local stages, and that discussion found its way to the Rotary Club of Auburn's noon meeting on Wednesday.

State Attorney General Steve Marshall was the guest speaker during the meeting and finished his presentation with a question-and-answer session. Rotary members asked Marshall about the opiate and methamphetamine issues facing the state.

"We consume, in this country, 85 percent of the opioids that are manufactured, and we have 5 percent of the population," Marshall said. "Meth is still here. There are hotspots in the state where it's more likely than others to be able to see it. It is still the No. 1 drug problem in the state.

"In Alabama, we've quadrupled the number of overdose deaths since 1999. They're not overdosing on meth. They're overdosing on these other drugs, particularly fentanyl," he continued. "That's why there's got to be a dual track to what we're doing. Meth is still a priority ... but it's a very different subset of people we're seeing suffering from this problem."

The Q&A session with Rotary Club members followed Marshall speaking about the lessons he's learned in his career as the former district attorney in Marshall County and his current role as the state's attorney general.

"Those lessons, I think, are not limited to that role that I've had before, but I do think impact what it is I'm doing now," he said. "What I thought I would do – really, prosecutors are storytellers – is share with you a few stories and how those particular cases impacted me."

He told how prosecuting a police officer for ethics violations taught him the need "to do the right thing for the right reasons in the right way and most importantly, regardless of the consequences."

Marshall shared stories of intervening on behalf of sexual assault victims, including one young girl who invited him and her counselor to witness her high school graduation. As a teenager, she was abused by her father multiple times, and he had been booked into jail on those charges more than a year earlier. Her plan was to go to college and become a counselor, so that she could assist other survivors of sexual assault.

"In the role of leadership, I think we have to embrace our opportunities to find ourselves as catalysts for change," he said. "This is a compelling story of a young lady who, as a result of what I had an opportunity to do, is going to affect others down the road in a very positive way."

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