



## **End It For Good Hosts Shift: From Drug War to Drug Health Drug Policy Summit**

November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Officials from End It For Good, a Mississippi non-profit organization dedicated to helping address drugs and drug use as complex health issues instead of criminal justice issues, recently hosted a day-long summit to explore the root causes of addiction and harm-reduction policy alternatives to the current enforcement system.

The event, titled SHIFT: From Drug War to Drug Health Drug Policy Summit, was held Nov. 3 at Lake Terrace Convention Center in Hattiesburg and included local and national guest speakers, panelists from faith and criminal justice areas, and personal stories.

“We invite Mississippians from across the spectrum – pretty much everybody from soccer moms to business men to law enforcement to pharmacists to health care leaders to education leaders – to support approaches to drugs that prioritize life and the opportunity to thrive,” said Brett Montague, CEO of End It For Good. “Through programs, what we do is help people see and explore new ways to address drugs.

“We help them see that if we address drugs as a complex health issue, that we could dramatically decrease crime, reduce overdose death rates and prevent the ongoing generational destabilization of families and communities that we’re seeing play out in Mississippi and throughout the nation.”

The summit began with a welcome by Montague, followed by a portion called “Addiction: What It Is and What It Isn’t” featuring Kent Dunnington – a professor at Biola University – and a personal story from James Moore. Moore, owner of Moore’s Bicycle Shop in Hattiesburg and a former Petal alderman, lost his son Jeffrey to addiction in 2015.

Next came “Harm Reduction: A Mindset SHIFT” with keynote speaker Angela Mallette and a personal story by Lacey Elkins. Mallette is the director of outreach for End It For Good, as well as a subject matter expert for the federal Opioid Response Network.

That was followed by a Legislative Panel with Sen. Juan Barnett of Senate District 34, Sen. Brice Wiggins of Senate District 52, Rep. Nick Bain of House District 2 and Rep. Kevin Horan of House District 34.

The second keynote speaker of the summit was Trevor Burrus, a research fellow at the Cato Institute’s Robert A. Levy Center for Constitutional Studies and editor-in-chief of the Cato

Supreme Court Review. He was written extensively on the errors of the drug war and lectured internationally on the subject.

Following Burruss was Dr. Carr McClain, a physician with Hattiesburg Clinic Heart & Vascular, with a personal story.

“This issue has been near and dear to my brain since I was young,” McClain said. “My career has brought it nearer and dearer to my heart, because people are more important than ideas, and it’s people – and people’s stories – that motivate a conference like this, or a movement.

“(When I became a physician), I never operated on anybody who was shot because they’d overdosed on drugs; I was operating on the results of drug prohibition. I was operating on the results of the black market that drug policy creates.”

The following portion of the event, a Criminal Justice Panel, was made up of Adrian Moore of the Reason Foundation, Lt. Diane Goldstein of Law Enforcement Action Partnership and Judge Prentiss Harrell of the 15th District Intervention Court. Next up was a Faith Panel with Rev. Steve Casteel of Heritage United Methodist Church in Hattiesburg, Rev. Marian Fortner of Christ Episcopal Church in Bay St. Louis and Rev. Barry Walker of The River in Philadelphia.

“This is actually the first statewide summit that we’ve held, and over the last three and a half years, we’ve held 26 community discussions where we do that education and provide a forum where people from the community can have dialogue amongst themselves,” Montague said. “Since we’ve done that around the state, all the way from Oxford down to Pascagoula, we feel like our growth and our brand recognition was big enough to take it to the next level.

“We wanted to bring this groundbreaking summit to our state to kind of foster civil, respectful dialogue throughout our state, and how to better address drugs and get hold of the opioid epidemic that we’re facing. For a hundred years, we’ve maintained the policy of prohibition, and launched an all-out offensive war on drugs for the last 50 years with the intended purpose of eradicating our world’s drug supply. Since the War on Drugs, drug use is up, overdose death rates are up, incarceration rates are up, and we’re losing on all fronts – including law enforcement, who is bogged down in a war that is perpetual and unwinnable.”