

# THE ROANOKE TIMES

**Platt: I lost my  
daughter to addiction.  
We must act to save  
others.**

- Susan Platt Platt was chief of staff to former Vice President Joe Biden and is one of three candidates seeking the Democratic nomination for lieutenant governor in the June 13 primary.

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By Susan Platt

Platt was chief of staff to former Vice President Joe Biden and is one of three candidates seeking the Democratic nomination for lieutenant governor in the June 13 primary.

Every time the telephone would ring, we feared something horrible had happened to our child or grandchildren ... and many times, it had.

My daughter struggled with her addiction for more than 12 years and keeping her alive and making sure our grandchildren were cared for was our family's daily crisis.

She was in and out of one treatment facility after another, and the bills piled up. With no health insurance, she relied on us to pay. Her father and I spent down our retirement savings to help keep her alive and keep our grandchildren safe. But while Ron and I were able to pay for rehab and to make sure there was a roof over head and food on the table, no amount of money in the world could help our daughter or erase the anguish in our hearts. No amount of money could erase the long-term pain and trauma of our grandchildren.

Last year, more than 1,400 Virginians died of drug overdose, a 28 percent rise from the year before. For the past three years, drug deaths in Virginia have outpaced gun-related and motor vehicle related deaths. State leaders are calling our problem a health crisis, but for the families of these victims, it is pure hell.

I know that hell. Her fight didn't end until she was taken from us by the scourge of addiction.

Too many Virginians and too many Americans have felt this pain. Although it took me years to talk about, I've decided that I need to share our story to give a voice to people who are not able to share their own experiences. I want everyone to know the struggle their neighbors across Virginia are experiencing, so I share our family's story everywhere I travel across the Commonwealth.

After each campaign event and forum, without fail, fellow Virginians will approach me, often giving a hug or on the verge of tears, and share with me quietly how addiction has affected them and their loved ones. These conversations have shown me that the crisis is even more

rampant than what the statistics show. But even though it's horrifying to soak in the magnitude of addiction, I believe we as a society can persevere.

While there are no quick fixes, we must act now to stop these senseless deaths. First and foremost, Virginia must expand Medicaid and take the federal funding that we need and deserve. Money can't fix everything, but it's an important part of the equation. Unfortunately, politicians from one party, both in Richmond and in Washington, have fought against Medicaid expansion and have tried to repeal the Affordable Care Act. Why would they turn their backs on people suffering from addiction and their loved ones by denying critical treatment programs?

In addition to strong public policy, our communities must circle around these families in need. From the pharmaceutical companies that make the painkillers and doctors who prescribe them, to our community and religious leaders, and to our police and first responders, we must all take ownership of our drug crisis and end this disaster that is tearing apart our communities, our families, and our children each day.

You and I are part of the solution, also. We must reach out to one another and find out how we can help our friends and neighbors struggling with addiction.

If I am so fortunate to be elected as Virginia's lieutenant governor, I will gather community leaders from across the Commonwealth and we will work together to continue and to expand a network that will help our neighbors who are suffering. I will also create a Cabinet-level position focused on helping Virginia's children, so that we can help them — and their families — before they get off track.

Thousands and thousands of Virginians are feeling helpless and hopeless. My family and I know that feeling. But I will not allow helplessness and hopelessness to ravage us. As Americans and as Virginians, we can pull together and bring help and hope to all who are suffering.



Susan Platt

Courtesy of Susan Platt