

Reuel Sample: Welcome to the GOP podcast, I am Reuel Sample, joined by John Hinnant, candidate for North Carolina House of Representatives. John, welcome aboard.

John Hinnant: Good afternoon. Thank you for having me.

Reuel Sample: John, you are a sandwich shop owner, a real estate appraiser, a boat owner, and most importantly, a dog owner. Tell us more about yourself.

John Hinnant: Yeah. Born and raised here in Wilmington. My grandfather and my father. My father's father and my father were both commercial contractors. My mother's father was a Cuban immigrant who was an international paper salesman, was killed by a hit by bus when my mother was about ten. So my grandmother and her two daughters were raised down in Lake Forest Estates. My grandmother was a farmhand and no real marketable skills, and so she took in businessmen's laundry to provide for the girls and the girls. As soon as they were old enough, they were working. My aunt is still alive up in Goldsboro, North Carolina. At one point, my mother owned a maternity and children's clothing store. My father was in construction. They split when I was about ten years old, and I graduated from Laney High School. About two and a half weeks after I graduated, I loaded the car. I drove to God's country, and four years later, I graduated from McRae College up in Banner out in North Carolina with a bachelor in history and had a most wonderful experience in the mountains. Played two years of college soccer. We were a junior college at the time and finished 11th and fourth in my two years there in the nation. Got involved in student life and founded an environmental organization on campus. And my senior year I served as student body president.

Reuel Sample: Foreshadows of running for political office.

John Hinnant: Something like that I guess. Yeah, it was a small school. I think our, I think our student body population was somewhere around 700 at the time that I was a senior. But it was a wonderful experience getting up in the mountains of North Carolina. We try to get back up there as often as we can. In 1998, we opened the underground sandwich shop. I designed it, I built it, I designed the menu, developed all the recipes and operated the restaurant for about seven years and sold it. Became a real estate appraiser. And then in my time down there, I got involved with Wilmington, downtown. It

was called Dare at the time: Downtown Area Revitalization. They changed the name to Wilmington, Downtown Inc in 2007. My predecessor, Suzi Hamilton, had stepped down and they were doing a national search. And I don't know, I wasn't on the search committee. I got a call from one of the search committee members and they said, Hey, have you thought about applying? I said, Oh, you guys are doing that sort of search. And I guess they just weren't happy. I'm not sure what was going on, but they asked me to apply and my wife and I kind of have a philosophy that when somebody says, Hey, why don't you apply for this job? Maybe as a courtesy you do it.

John Hinnant: And it was a long conversation that night. And next Monday I submitted my resume and was hired in May of 2007 and had had a rough patch there at the beginning. But we we came through that rough patch. We did a strategic plan update. And I'm proud of my efforts there. We assisted over 50 companies that located downtown and helped create or located over 500 jobs downtown. And so I felt like that was a real good accomplishment. I helped site selection on to hotels, the Convention Center Hotel. We did some economic studies and analysis for the RFP process to help those apply and see that a full service 200 room hotel was absolutely needed downtown. And one of our goals of our strategic plan back then was 500 hotel rooms in five years and had people look at me like I was crazy. But Downtown Market was so underserved with hotel rooms and they are these hotels. When they open up downtown, they open up at 85% occupancy on day one. I mean, it's amazing.

Reuel Sample: That's insane.

John Hinnant: Well, you think about when people come to our community from out of town, where do they want to be? They either want to be on the beach or they want to be downtown. Yeah. And and, you know, I left in 2013 to get into commercial real estate. In the last two years, I've been working on some of those older dated hotels along Market Street, and we've been turning some of them over and they're getting repurposed into apartments. But you have to remember Market Street or Highway 17 historically was the primary way in and out of the town. And so that's where the hotel is located back then. And so I've been having a real hyper focus on those older hotels along Market Street in the last couple of years and having some success. And between now and Election Day will be a couple of them will be up for rezoning and there'll be a lot of media around the the renewal of Market Street, the corridor.

Reuel Sample: Wilmington should be extraordinarily proud of what goes on downtown. It's a beautiful city and there's a lot of things down there, a lot of small businesses of all types that are downtown.

John Hinnant: Yeah. And I'll tell you, one of the one of the hallmarks of downtown is, is that it's the largest and oldest historic district in the state. And that was because a lot of champions and some of my predecessors at Wilmington, downtown, including Jean Merritt and Mary Gauntlett and Suzy Hamilton, they they really promoted they really advocated, they really educated about the importance of historic preservation and protecting those older buildings, because those are the postcard memories that people, when they leave and they say, describe Wilmington, they go, oh, it's historic. And it's they've got this image in their head. And yeah, we got the Riverwalk and the battleship and the bridge. But people will remember those covered front porches and the flags and the flowers and the plants and the brick walls. And, you know, it's I can I could talk about downtown for hours, but just I really love our city. I think it's great. And I have a lot of community pride.

Reuel Sample: You can see more about what John has done and what he's into on his website. But with all of that going on, John, why in the world would you get into politics and start running for board state house for North Carolina?

John Hinnant: That's a great question. You know, and it's a great story as to why. 2020, during the lockdowns in the spring, my music director and my church came to my front yard during the week of Easter and played about six songs in our front yard. And all the neighbors were like, This was so great, newer spiritual songs and a couple of pop songs, and it sparked an idea. And so we've had a concert series in our front yard six weeks on Saturday night, we invited friends to come to our front yard and we encouraged all the neighbors to have friends come to their front yard. And so for about eight yards on either side of the street, either side of us, people were sitting out in front porch and we had these these concerts. And the sixth one, the last one was on Memorial Day weekend. And the following weekend we were kind of decompressing. We were we were looking at social media. And if you remember, social media was weird. The news was weird.

Reuel Sample: Everything was weird.

John Hinnant: Everything. Everything really weird. And you're watching preachers and parishioners get ticketed, arrested, and gym owners are getting arrested and they shut down our boat ramps. And my wife looked at me and said, one of us has got to do something. And so I said, you know, I've been asked over the years to get involved that the GOP had been recruiting me that year and my father was ailing. He was ill, he was older and elderly, and he died last year, a month before his 87th birthday.

Reuel Sample: Oh, I'm sorry to hear that.

John Hinnant: Oh, thank you. I appreciate that. But it's important for me to be there in his later days. And I didn't want to be distracted with politics. And so this year, when filing was delayed or whatever happened with the lawsuits, I looked at my wife and said, hey, you know, there's this opportunity. We've got time to put together a plan if you think we if you're still up for it, she said, let's go. So she's been my biggest, most enthusiastic and supporter and encourager. And and so that's kind of why my wife asked me to so and so I've been really it's really been humbling, the overwhelming amount of support that's come from this. And I've been real excited about it. And I call people and hey, I'm running to go, well, it's either thank you or are you crazy? You've got a successful career. Why would you why would you distract yourself? And I was like, Well, I think we can do better things in Raleigh. I think I think I can be effective in Raleigh. And I want to see things done for our community that have been getting ignored in the past. And so I'm really excited about it.

Reuel Sample: Well, let's talk about some of the issues that you are that you are dealing with. We're going to talk a little bit about education, but not in the ways that we've been talking with some of our other candidates. You're a big proponent of innovation in education. What is that all about?

John Hinnant: So I've always been a creative thinker. I've always I've always been interested and intrigued by innovation. And I also firmly believe that education is League One, the first priority of any economic development strategy for anybody. And if you're going to build the next economy, you have to start with education. And I think at the higher level of education and college and community college and even in high school,

we need to be finding more innovative ways to produce the modern workforce - job training. And and I'll tell you there's something that I've got it on my website. You know I would be in favor right now of. Working with nonviolent offenders in the prison system to teach the trades. I mean, if anybody has tried to renovate or do home repair or build a home, you know how difficult it is to find the trades to get them to work. I mean, and here's here we have a captive audience. Nonviolent offenders. And if we can get them trained in the trades, then they get out. It lowers their chance of recidivism. They can go right to work. We've got people with demand. We've got we got people who want or need the trades. We got tradespeople who need to hire people. You know, the trades and construction is very much a numbers game. I can take more work if I have the people to do the job.

Reuel Sample: Yes.

John Hinnant: So and so it's a very much a numbers game. But we have this opportunity to really prepare our community and our state for the for the economy and prepare the workforce for the economy that we have today in the economy we're going to have tomorrow.

Reuel Sample: You know, the guy who narrates the that Alaskan fishing company who's who's into all this and started Mike Rowe. Mike Rowe. That's exactly right. You know, one of his big things, he says that we can digitize a whole bunch. And if those of you who are watching on video, that's your dog.

John Hinnant: Bubs. Bub's short for Bubbles.

Reuel Sample: Another another another supporter, I hope.

John Hinnant: Yeah. Yeah, he he's named after character in the HBO series The Wire.

Reuel Sample: Okay. So that's why you see that's why you see John fiddling around over there. He's he's keeping bubs at bay. But Mike Rowe is known for saying that you can digitize a whole bunch of things, but you can't digitalize a house, you can't digitize water, you can't digitize electricity. That's why you need the trades. And education takes a form in so many ways.

John Hinnant: So nothing digital will ever turn to screw.

Reuel Sample: That's exactly right. That's exactly right. And we can make that happen here in North Carolina.

John Hinnant: Right, right. And and podcast plug, The Way I Heard It With Mike Rose, one of the best podcasts out there. Second to this one, of course.

Reuel Sample: So thank you very much. And you could find Mike Rowe as well as this podcast on any of your favorite podcast hosting platforms. Another thing that we've talked about along with education is school safety. We've seen seen time and time again issues about school safety and it comes down to a variety of platforms. People are really, really on fire about this because we're talking about our kids - our vulnerable people as they go into, quite frankly, a vulnerable area.

John Hinnant: Right. And around school safety. Yeah. And you know, I mentioned earlier about the historic district and we have a lot of historic homes and historic schools and my kids attend tended to my daughter will be a senior this year and last year she was a couple of hundred feet from that shooting. And as a parent, when you receive that phone call, that panicked phone call. You know, it really sends a scare through your soul. And I think that's really important that we we provide funding so that these older schools can do some renovations to make it more secure. I think we can invest in more school resource officers, and I think we should invest in more mental health professionals for our school systems. And I want to point out that that my opponent voted against additional school resource officers. She voted against more mental health professionals in our schools. And she voted against school safety improvement grants. And I, along with a lot of parents from new high school, would take that personally. And my kids went through Gregory and they did shelter in place more often than they did tornado drills. So unbelievable. It's just we've disrupted the school day because of shots fired close by. And and it's and as a result, the kids are losing the opportunity to learn. And we're not seeing we're not seeing what we need out of our current representative. And that's one of the reasons I'm running as well.

Reuel Sample: It's so simple. You put trained officers in and other people who can handle these things even before they start. And our kids are safer. They don't have to worry about that.

John Hinnant: Yeah. Congressman Budd, who's running for US Senate in North Carolina, has proposed legislation in Washington to make it easier for veterans to transition into a school job, be it a teacher or security officer or school resource officer or an imagine. Imagine having a veteran as a male. Mentor. Yeah. Campus. A small school. Campus.

Reuel Sample: It doesn't take much. It doesn't take much. And there's common sense things that that unfortunately the folks on the other side of the aisle keep voting against for some reason or another, they keep they just keep voting it down. Let's talk about economic future. How are we going to make sure that North Carolina, New Hanover County and United States of America are going to grow into the country that it's supposed to be?

John Hinnant: Well, I'll tell you, since the Republicans took over the legislature in 2011, the 2010 election is where the Republicans took over the legislature for the first time in over 100 years. They've reduced the debt by 60%. And I've given you a little bit about my background. My father, my grandfather were contractors. My mother was a small business owner. At one point. She was an executive administrative assistant who grew up in poverty. And so I come from the working class, the middle class, and I think we have to put the middle class and the working class first. Especially now with high inflation and these prices are still high. I mean, we my wife walked in earlier and said, hey, chicken wings were \$3.20, \$3.30 at some store. And that's the cheapest we've seen it in over a year. I mean, and that's not cheap.

Reuel Sample: Yeah, exactly.

John Hinnant: I mean, mayonnaise is \$2 more jar than it was back in January. Gas is still pushing \$4 a gallon, right under \$4 a gallon. It's extremely hard for working families and the middle class to kind of make ends meet right now. I mean, families are making choices now to to cut cut the budget and avoid vacations or they're doing staycations as opposed to traveling. So we really have to do more to make sure that families can keep

more of their hard earned money and cut taxes. And I think that's something we're going to have to not just work for, but fight for.

Reuel Sample: Republicans have a plan for that.

John Hinnant: Yeah, the corporate tax over the next five years will be completely eliminated. And if you think about a business tax, the tax on a business is only passed on to the consumer.

Reuel Sample: Yeah, exactly. Corporations don't pay taxes. That's basic economics that that the folks on the left don't seem to get. Companies don't pay taxes. Individuals pay taxes.

John Hinnant: Right. And so they're going to continue to reduce the personal property tax over the next five years as well. And what we've seen since 2011, we're able to cut taxes, we're able to increase revenues, we're able to reduce debt. And then suddenly a left wing media group like CNBC calls us the number one state for business. Okay.

Reuel Sample: All right. Well, whatever, you know, we'll take it. And finally, let's talk about the other the other big thing that you're working on is law enforcement, is that we're seeing across the country almost a buyer's remorse in all these folks who called for defunding of police. They tried tearing apart that, frankly, thin blue line that protects us all. And they're seeing an increase in crime. We're seeing police officers retire. What are you thinking about doing about that, John?

John Hinnant: So I want to make sure that our law enforcement officers and first responders are fully funded as best they can. In the last three weeks across North Carolina, we've had seven police officers shot to killed, unfortunately. And this is a direct result of people who, like my opponent, who signed the pledge to defund the police. And, you know, she has to be held to account for that. It's absolutely. Unbelievable that she would sign that pledge. And then now we have and she's not mentioned anything in her social media about this. I mean, every every member of the legislature that I follow on social media have been putting out notices like, hey, we've had not six now and seven. We've had two dead. Hey, let's let's left them up in prayer. Let's, let's, let's make sure we fund our law enforcement. And so I want to make sure that we're we are tough

on crime, but we're strong we have a strong spine when it comes to supporting our law enforcement, our first responders.

Reuel Sample: Law enforcement. They're out there. They're putting their bodies between crime and those of us who just want to be safe and free, and they're doing this quite often at very low pay. And we continue to vilify them and ignore them, disrespect them. It's got to stop.

John Hinnant: Well, I did I did a ride along when I was during my time at Wilmington, downtown. And I can't tell you the level of professionalism that I found with the Wilmington PD. These guys were not only are they out there two and three in the morning and they're driving down dark streets with the the public lighting is low and and addressing issues as I see them, but they're tremendously professional when they do it. I had so much respect for those guys. I had respect for them before I went, but it blew me away how professional they were. In the most difficult of circumstances.

Reuel Sample: How could people get a hold of you? How can they find out more about you?

John Hinnant: The website is electjohnhinnant.com. You can email me at that website. It's info@johnhinnant.com. My cell phone number is 9106193430.

John Hinnant: I want to close with this, Reuel. I appreciate the opportunity and I appreciate the county making the investment in the podcast. You know, I think voters and citizens in New Hanover County want somebody who's going to go to Raleigh and represent them. And that's what I seek to do. My opponent in 2019 violated House rules and really lost control over emotions and screaming at Republicans and screaming at the speaker the more when she didn't get her way. And what's what's happened is she's rendered herself completely ineffective. So if there's something we need here from the state legislature, be it a road or a bridge or anything. If her name is on it, it's dead. It's just she can't get anything done. And to give you a good example, towards the end of the short session, Ted Davis sponsored a bill for fast polluters pay, and it's revolving around Gen X.

Reuel Sample: Big issues down here.

John Hinnant: Big issues. And she co-sponsored it but didn't have the courtesy to show up to the meeting while it was read into committee. Unbelievable. And. It was audible. There was 40 or more people in the room and it was completely audible. You could hear a representative say, If Deb Butler's name is on it, it's not going to pass. And I don't know why we would send somebody back up there if that's the way she's thought of by other members of the House of Representatives. And and it's made her completely ineffective. And I feel like we can do better. And and I'm willing to give it a shot. And I hope voters are willing to give me a shot. So thank you very much.

Reuel Sample: John headed for North Carolina's state house representative. What district are you representing?

John Hinnant: It's the 18th that covers mostly downtown. At Northern New Hanover County in parts of. Northern part of the county in the waterway, as I like to say, almost all the 284001. Almost all add to it a. Lot of 24 of five. All of two eight, four, 11, and a little bit to 843. Pretty big area.

John Hinnant: 17 precincts in all.

Reuel Sample: John, I know you're very, very busy. It looks like Bubbs needs to go out. Thanks for being here, John.

John Hinnant: Thank you for having me for.