



The GOP Podcast

Episode 8: A New Sheriff In Town: Matt Rhodes

**Reuel Sample:** Safer streets, safer schools, protecting our Second Amendment rights. Welcome to the GOP podcast. I'm Reuel Sample talking with Matt Rhodes, candidate for Sheriff. Good evening, Matt. Great for you to be here.

**Matt Rhodes:** Thank you for having me.

**Reuel Sample:** I ask this of all of our candidates, because most of them have never been in political office before. Why are you running for sheriff? Tell us about yourself.

**Matt Rhodes:** Well, I'm a lifelong New Hanover County resident. My father was a old Wilmington lawyer. He was a World War Two combat veteran. And he had me much later in life. And fortunately, in the ten years that I had him, I saw him every day serving the community, serving a lot of people, helping people, protecting the community. And that's where I learned a lot about service and that ultimately, if you're going to get into politics, that what it needs, that's what it needs to be about is serving your fellow man, your community, not trying to enrich yourself, but make the area you live in a far better place.

**Reuel Sample:** You know, we talk about Blue Bloods on television. You really do have that blue blood that that that desire to serve your community and whatever whatever position you're in.

**Matt Rhodes:** Well, without a doubt, because my father came up the hard way. And when he made it through hard work and sacrifice, he definitely gave back to people. He was very compassionate, but at the same time very disciplined in his actions. So I followed that path.

**Reuel Sample:** Let's talk about some of the things that you are running on, because there are important and important issues. Let's talk about public safety. The last couple of years, we have seen crime spike across the country. We have seen out of control riots. We have seen murder rates and theft rates and violence rates go through the roof. What's going on Matt and how can you solve that?

**Matt Rhodes:** Well, locally, a lot of our crime is related to the drug trafficking problem we have. I was on the New Hanover County Crime Juvenile Prevention Board around 2016, and during those meetings we would talk about the issues of keeping juveniles away from a criminal life. And a lot of times what I found was that it came back to drug abuse, whether it be in the family or one of these young people gets addicted to them and it completely changes their behavior forever. So what a lot of people are not aware of is that New Hanover County is the number one place in North Carolina for this drug problem. So the addiction problem becomes a drug trafficking problem because what it ultimately is is a way for criminal groups, no matter if you want to call them gangs or local groups or someone who thinks, well, I'm going to start dealing drugs and make a lot of money, you know, and in New Hanover County, we have very serious heavy hitters. We have the Crips, the Bloods. We have cartels that come in and out of here. We have human trafficking. We have people coming in from outside of the state doing major drug deals. So that's why you see the violence ramping up in this area. And, you know, it's not like it is a situation where we have a shooting and then you don't see anything. It's a very much an ongoing problem in this area.

**Reuel Sample:** We don't like to think about that because Wilmington is Wilmington and it's its home town. But you're saying that we are the number one drug place in North Carolina.

**Matt Rhodes:** As far as the drug opioid addiction problem? We are number one. And I remember when judge opening talked about this in one of the meetings, you know, this is not anything that we want to have as far as selling ourselves to people who want to

move here and start businesses and stuff like that. So I think a lot of times being on the coast, the idea is to sort of sell the beauty of the coast. This is a wonderful area to have a family start a business. But the reality is, like a lot of places throughout the United States, things have changed. And these opioids and a lot of those opioids are coming in through the border and they they come all the way to Wilmington, North Carolina and New Hanover County. They affect people's lives from the standpoint of safety. So this problem becomes an issue on the streets. You do have an increase of crime in the city of Wilmington, which is in the county. I always tell people the city is in the county. So you have that issue. You have issues that now have gone into the school system where there is dealing in the schools a lot of time by youth gangs, which makes the school a very unsafe place for kids to learn.

**Matt Rhodes:** And so, you know, on top of the school safety issue, worrying about someone coming on to a school campus, you have to worry about issues that take place inside of the campus in regards to this drug trade that we have. And we had a situation like that at the very beginning of the school year last year at New Hanover, where in the walkway we had a 15 year old looking for a very specific student that went to New Hanover, and he went there with a gun to kill him. And fortunately, no one was killed. Someone was shot. And it took place in the walkway from one side of the street to the other. And one thing that a lot of people pointed out to me, because there was a YouTube video and a lot of these are deputies that are going to remain nameless because they pointed out to me right away there was not one SRO officer in the walkway, there was not one SRO officer on the ground. So there was no one to react at that very moment. And so it is a divine intervention scenario where no one was killed. But a lot of people.

**Reuel Sample:** Those who might not know all the acronyms, SRO stands for School or Safety Resource Officer. And what you're saying is that there were none in that area. Let's let's talk about school safety specifically. What would you have done? What would you have had in place if you were the sheriff? And what will you be doing as sheriff going forward?

**Matt Rhodes:** Well, there's a lot of issues of school safety in New Hanover County, and I'll hit on those in the amount of time that we have in great detail. But when you look at a campus, your first initial concern, especially after say, if you look at Uvalde. Someone

coming in onto the campus and trying to kill people. I mean, this is as point blank as it gets.

**Reuel Sample:** That's where they are launching an attack to kill people. That's that's what they're for.

**Matt Rhodes:** Yeah. So the whole scenario is, is if you only have SRO officers inside of the school. That's a problem because they're already on the campus, so they're halfway there. And a lot of times what I have found in New Hanover County is that the students and the parents and teachers say doors are left open. So the reality is the SRO officers need to be walking the inside of the school, checking doors, making sure that they're sufficiently locked. But you need to have the school resource officer on the outside, especially the large campus of the perimeter, to basically see that attack before it begins to be very aware of who is coming on campus and also to act as a deterrent. Because I saw a fight on 41st Street across from Hoggard right before school got out last summer. And it was basically on the crosswalk. And it was four young men who were obviously Hoggard students fighting it out. And they had pulled piping off of this apartment and we're going at it. And ultimately, the SRO officer and a city officer had to jump in their vehicle. They had to navigate the parking lot, which is very congested with kids walking, parents dropping their children off. They had to navigate that. They get onto shipyard, which is dangerous and busy any time of day. And then they had to come around to that apartment complex and stop it. So, you know, it definitely took, I would guesstimate, probably somewhere between 5 to 8 minutes for them to literally go 200 yards.

**Reuel Sample:** That's a lot of time. That's a lot of time.

**Matt Rhodes:** And it doesn't take but a split second for something to happen. So I would suggest having officers on the perimeter and I would also suggest having officers inside. But also to you need to train the teachers how to properly lock a room down in the event of a school shooting, but also to how to properly evacuate. Because I think that a lot of the teachers in Uvalde were thinking, well, I could break this window and get these kids out of here, but I know the police are here, so I'm just going to hold tight. So the parents need to understand that it's not just the school resource officers, but that the

teachers need to be trained just as well in regards to the safety. But getting those kids out, if that's an option.

**Reuel Sample:** We don't want to make our schools Fort Knoxes, though. They are places of learning.

**Matt Rhodes:** You know, and the thing is this is that I've had people say, well, you know, we need metal detectors and this, that and the other. I don't really think that in a lot of these situations that would make a difference per se. If someone comes onto a school campus, you know, what good is a metal detector going to do if that's what they intend as far as the school shooting? And also to, you know, today there was a situation in Jacksonville, North Carolina, where a student was killed and a lot of the details have not come out. It was a stabbing. So initially you think, well, it's got to be a knife. It could be a lot of things. It could be a sharp piece of plastic. A metal detector is not going to pick that up. It could be a piece of glass. A metal detector is not going to pick that up. So the thing is that you want to make sure that the perimeter is covered, that they are literally walking the perimeter, that they are very aware of their surroundings. At the same time, you want to make sure that doors are locked and you want to make sure that you understand what the access points of the school are. You know, is there a front door? Is that where all the students come in? Well, if that's the case, that's the easier thing for you to cover. But if you have multiple access points and you are allowing teachers and students to open doors up and keep them open in the course of the day, that is a recipe for disaster. So I don't want to make the schools Fort Knox, but I want to make sure that we think out of the box about what could potentially happen. How do we deal with those situations and at the same time make sure that these kids are safe, but they don't feel like they're going to school in a military zone. That's not my intention.

**Reuel Sample:** But would you be in favor of bringing in veterans to serve as SROs?

**Matt Rhodes:** Well, you know, something is this is that I know that the sheriff's department, from what I'm hearing from several different people that work in the department, that they're down roughly 30 or 40 deputies. And someone said, well, how would you fill those spots? You know, there are plenty of veterans in this area that could pass the physical, the psychological that would like to do that type of work because they are so service oriented. And also a lot of times when you have a veteran, they look at

things from a different perspective. They are very aware of their surroundings. If they've served in the military, they've been on a military base. So you want to make sure that perimeter is locked down and safe. And what I also do find that in these types of situations that a lot of these veterans, they have very good social skills when it comes to respect for people. So that's another big part of it as well, because you have to have law enforcement that can interact with the students, be in contact with the people in the school that really know everything going on. The people that know what's going on in the school is going to be the janitor. It's going to be the receptionist. It's going to be anyone working in the lunchroom, you know? And those are your your key pieces of information. But if you're a deputy who does not seem approachable to a student or a teacher, that can be a problem in and of itself. They need to build a rapport with these students and with the faculty there, but also to build a rapport in the event that a student needs to come to them and say, look, I've got something going on, whether it be in the classroom with another student or at home as a point of help for them before it gets out of hand.

**Reuel Sample:** And what an opportunity to be a role model for students that whatever age, whether for military, former military, police officers, for them to be on that campus and to understand that authority doesn't have to be somebody who's out to get you is that it's an authority is there to protect you and to serve.

**Matt Rhodes:** Well, you know, and that's the whole thing. Is this is that right now, anyone wearing a badge, there's a target on their chest and back 24 seven. And a lot of officers are retiring early because not just the defund the police movement, but the whole aspect that if you look across the country, a lot of officers are being. You know, they're being assassinated. They are intentionally being hunted down. So what I've had here locally is a lot of deputies that, you know, I'm on very good terms with and I'll see them at a grocery store, you know, and they're in plainclothes. They're not working at that moment. They're still a deputy. And I'll say, Well, how are things going? And they'll say, I quit six months ago. Wow. Because my wife was terrified for me and it was affecting my, you know, my marriage, my home life. And I took a job at Lowe's Home Improvement. I'm not making as much money. I'm not doing what I love, but my wife feels that I'm safer. So they're looking at it like that. From that perspective, they are now perceived to be the bad guy. And the reality is, growing up, whenever I saw a police

officer, deputy, anyone with a uniform and a badge, I knew that that was someone who was on the streets for my safety and well-being.

**Matt Rhodes:** And even as a teenager, you know, getting a speeding ticket, I never was disrespectful to an officer. I was always, yes, sir, yes, ma'am, thank you. Have a safe day, so on and so forth, because ultimately they're out there doing their job, you know? I mean, so that's the thing. It's a very dangerous, difficult job. So I definitely want to build PR from the standpoint of kids looking at these deputies as someone they can go to when they need help, someone who is there for their protection, and someone that ultimately when things go bad. And what is worse than a child's life in danger? They're going to react without hesitation. They're going to run to the threat and they're going to stop it. And in the process of it, they could very easily lose their life. That is the commitment that they make. So that is the level of respect that we need to have for these officers.

**Reuel Sample:** What we saw in Uvalde and what we saw in Columbine over two decades ago is that if you don't go in, if you don't if you don't try to get the situation under control as quickly as possible, more lives are lost. And that's what you're saying is we've got to get people in there to take care of it. Trained SROs, trained teachers, trained school administrators to help with all of that so that it doesn't get out of control.

**Matt Rhodes:** Well, an interesting thing, and I've been very fortunate to have a lot of teachers and mentors and locally. One of my mentors is a gentleman named Larry Barney. And Larry Barney was one of the founding members of the hostage rescue team for the FBI.

**Reuel Sample:** Well, that's yeah, that's that's not a that's a soft job, isn't it? That's not a tough job.

**Matt Rhodes:** Yeah. He, you know, he he went in depth talking to me about the level of training physically and psychologically and those types of things. But he really was it is focused on the whole idea of stopping school violence. And so when we talked about Columbine, he said the lesson learned was this SWAT team shows up and they're looking at a schematic of the school, trying to know where they're going to go as they move through it. And they're hearing gunshot after gunshot after gunshot. And he said

every gunshot is a child or a teacher or a staff member who's dying in their minds. And it was so he said they completely changed how they dealt with those things, that after that it was standard practice that a law enforcement officer, irregardless where they are, especially in a school, you hear a gunshot, you run to it even if you're by yourself. And I might be off on this because stats change periodically. But the stat that I came across about five years ago was in an active shooting scenario. If no one responds at the moment that the attack takes place, the average number of lives lost is anywhere from 14 to 15 people.

**Matt Rhodes:** If someone responds at that very moment and by respond, I mean they go to the threat. They don't necessarily have to be successful in completely stopping it. Slowing it down is ultimately what you're trying to do. The average number of people that are killed is 2 to 3. So that gives people more time to get out. Now, granted, 2 to 3 lives lost is too many for me, but that's a better number when you start looking at 15. And if you look at the Uvalde scenario, 19 lives were lost until ultimately, you know, and it changes periodically. You have a border agent who hears about it while he's getting a haircut and his wife works there and he goes in he breaks the lines of the law enforcement because they were literally pulling parents back. So in that case of Vivaldi, it was a failure. Those officers should have gone in and they did not. So it takes an off duty Border Patrol agent to go in. There was also a couple of mothers. There was a young Hispanic mother who goes in for like 90 pounds soaking wet. She goes in there and she gets her kids out. You know that that needs to be the next chief of police of Uvalde.

**Reuel Sample:** That's right. Because because because the present chief has been has been dismissed if I saw the news right. But, Matt, the the answer from the left to all of this is let's take the guns away. We've got to we've got to take the guns away. And then there won't be any more school violence. What's your answer to that?

**Matt Rhodes:** Well, that is a complete fallacy, because the reality is that if someone has malicious intent, they're looking to harm kill people, they will find a way. And if you look at Great Britain, granted, where guns are very difficult to get to, are the main tools used in murders are knives and hammers. You can go to a hardware store and buy a hammer for \$7. And it's meant to be used to drive nails and pull nails out of wood and stuff like that. But a lot of people have been killed with hammers. A lot of people have



been killed with knives, you know, so when you go and buy a knife, they don't do a background check. They don't do a background check when you buy a hammer. So ultimately, they want to blame the guns. It's the person's malicious intent. A gun is an inanimate object. It is all about the operator behind it using it. And it's just like when I talk to my kids about gun safety and I say, Why does dad have a gun? And they say, to protect us. Us being my son, my wife, my daughter and myself, and potentially an innocent bystander.

**Reuel Sample:** You teach gun safety?

**Matt Rhodes:** I do. I'm actually certified through the state to teach the concealed carry course. But ultimately to you to teach the laws of justified self defense. What does that mean in the state of North Carolina? I am certified to teach basic pistol as well. I teach rifle and shotgun, but the reality is that a pistol is a compromise. It is a smaller firearm that people can have with them. A lot of times when they I mean, could you imagine going grocery shopping and, you know, you've got your mossberg shotgun that's going to draw a lot of attention and the wrong kind. But what I do like about the concealed carry permit for North Carolina is that you do take a course that explains the laws to you, explains the places that are off limits, how to interact with law enforcement very respectfully, but also to what does justified self defense mean? I feared for my life. That is why I believed that I had to use lethal force to defend myself. But also to you go through a two hour range safety with the firearm. Now that by no means prepares you for the next dangerous altercation you might run into. But it's a good starting point.

**Reuel Sample:** And let's face it, most gun owners, most gun owners hope they never get into a situation where they have to use it. Most gun owners use and respect their firearms properly. It's not the vast majority of gun owners that's the issue. It's the criminals who have the guns, who have criminal intent. Those are the ones that that are the problem.

**Matt Rhodes:** Without a doubt. And, you know, the thing that I tell people is that I was actually in a gun store in New Hanover County. Not going to tell you which one? When someone actually stole a gun while I was in there? And it was it was very intense. And what happened was. A young man comes in, he sees a gun that he wants to look at. He asks the person behind the counter, Can I see that? And literally he put it on the counter

and the second to hit the glass he grabbed it and ran for the door. And a lot of people ran right after him because they're screaming, he stole a gun. He stole a gun. I didn't move that fast. I don't rush to my death. You know, I. I look at it like, you know, let me let me see how this is going to unfold. By the time I got outside, he had been apprehended. And what happened was he basically said that he owed someone money for drugs. This person was in a gang and that the person the dealer would take a gun and trade. So that is a situation where this person could not have bought a gun. Most likely he was already a felon. And at the same time, he saw no problem with stealing a gun. So where do you think that gun was going to end up? That gun was going to be stuck in some law abiding citizens face in a home invasion or a robbery or a number of crimes in.

**Reuel Sample:** Or a school.

**Matt Rhodes:** Without a doubt. Without a doubt. You know, so the school issue is something that I talk about a lot. And growing up here, what I will say is that we have 45 public schools and they're all throughout the county. Some in better neighborhoods than others. Some people can afford to move into a different school district. I do not take away from them. If that's something you can do, I support it. If you want a home, school or private school, I'm with you. But a lot of people are locked in those areas and the schools that their kids go to or grandkids or nieces or nephews. I mean, basically, they're war zones. You know, they had given up on those in the eighties when I was a teenager. We need to clean every single school up, get the bad element out. And one of the ways that I've thought about doing this that is not going to affect taxpayers and I've spoken about it, is that the use of the K-9 unit, the drug sniffing dogs, taking them through the schools, through the hallways, through the locker rooms, through the lunchroom, through the parking lot to the surrounding areas. And ultimately, when they hit on something and they will, you know, whose whose is this? What is this? Where did you get it? Why do you have it here? And you start to build a case towards ultimately the person who basically had this student dealing in a school or where did they get it from? A lot of these dogs also, too, can hit on gunpowder.

**Matt Rhodes:** So if someone tries to sneak a weapon in, they could do that as well. The nice thing about it is, is that it's very effective. And from a PR standpoint, it's very good because a drug sniffing dog, a tracking dog, is not a attack dog. So those are the dogs

you can go and pet. And we had a situation here years ago where a girl was abducted and one of the K-9 units found her and that dog stayed with her and gave her comfort and support. So we can build the PR, but it's highly effective. And at the same time we've already paid for these dogs and these handlers have gone through extensive training. Why would we waste that resource that we already have? And ultimately, if someone's dealing in the area, it's going to get out really quick. Hey, that new sheriff comes through here with that dog. We can't we can't go to this school. So simple things like that affect us.

**Reuel Sample:** And it also it's a great it's a great way for I'm thinking that instead of the policeman introducing the dog, it's actually the dog introducing the policeman or introducing the sheriff to the kids, because who who are they going to go to first? They're going to go to the dog first. And and then they they get introduced to the person who's handling the dog. What a great idea. I like that.

**Matt Rhodes:** Is very simple and effective.

**Reuel Sample:** Matt Rhodes for Sheriff. How can they get a hold of you?

**Matt Rhodes:** One other thing I want to talk about real fast is one other issue in the school system is we've had about 20 plus years of issues of sexual assaults on students. But teachers and other staff members. And it is really gone unanswered. And a lot of people say to me, you know, the proof is that ultimately the people in admin knew about it, the sheriff knew about it. The current sheriff had been sheriff for 12 years, and it's been going on during that. And while he was still chief of detectives. So what would you do differently? Well, first of all, I'm going to bring it to light. I'm going to talk to the administration. I'm going to talk to the principals, everyone in the school, the parents, the kids. And this will no longer happen. Okay. Because you cannot steal a child's innocence, because when parents drop those kids off, especially now, they are very worried about their safety. So it's one thing to be worried about the idea of someone coming onto a school to harm them. It's another thing about someone who actually works there, who is grooming them or sexually assaulting them. We're going to put an end to that. That is not going to happen anymore. We're going to be very vigilant about that. I'm going to be very vocal about that, and it will not happen and we'll get to

the bottom of it. But anyway, if someone is looking to contact me [rhodesforsheriff.com](http://rhodesforsheriff.com). And I'll give you my cell phone number 910-538-2465.

**Reuel Sample:** Matt Rhodes for Sheriff. Matt, we're going to talk with you some more on our podcast on a later date. So good to talk to you. Look, folks, you can see him on the screen. The man looks like a sheriff. You know, he's smiling at you right now, but you really don't want him to be glaring at you. You're what? You're what? Six foot four, something like that?

**Matt Rhodes:** No, I'm only six foot. You know, I still work out, you know, so I mean, that's the whole thing. You have to stay physically and mentally fit. And a lot of that with the firearms instruction, I tell people, don't always think just because you have a gun that you were in a life and death altercation, you better have some physical abilities as well.

**Reuel Sample:** Exactly. Exactly. And Matt Rhodes is going to get this done. Matt, thanks for. Thanks for spending some time with us.

**Matt Rhodes:** Thank you so much.