



The NHC GOP Podcast

Episode 12: Accountability and Transparency: Pat Bradford for New Hanover County Board of Education

Reuel Sample: Bringing leadership, integrity, accountability and transparency to the Board of Education and New Hanover County. It's all about the children. Happy to be joined by Pat Bradford and Patricia O'Neil here on the NHC GOP podcast. Good evening, folks. Welcome aboard and good to have you both.

Pat Bradford: It's good to be here, Reuel.

Patti O'Neill: Thank you. Thank you, Reuel. It's great to be back with you. And it's good to meet you, Pat.

Reuel Sample: I've got Pat and Patti going on tonight, so it's going to be an interesting podcast. Pat, you are new to the political arena, but you are absolutely not new to the areas of education. You are bringing a wealth of knowledge to this school board. Tell us a little bit about yourself. Tell us about Pat Bradford.

Pat Bradford: Well, as you said, I'm a political outsider and I'm a business owner, and I bring that to this school board. I have been in business for 40 years. I've been in this same job for 24 years, and it's unique. I'm the owner of Wrightsville Beach Magazine, and it's unique in that. Well for 15 years. I also did Lumina News, which is a weekly newspaper for this community. And as such, for the last 24 years I've been following local government to report on it. Journalists are supposed to care. Supposed to hold local government accountable. And we took that job seriously. I manage the team and

so I've been reporting on local government for longer than some people have even been alive and I know it well. I understand how boards work. I understand Robert's Rules of Order. Course I had a class in that in college, but I get local government and that's a unique perspective. I get business, I get budgets and hiring and firing and insurance and worker's compensation and vendor management and contracts and attorneys. I understand all of that and I won't have to have a learning curve there. I'll hit the ground running in those areas.

Patti O'Neill: What what motivated you to run?

Pat Bradford: The state of our school system motivated me to run. I heard things. I heard a lot of things. And after the 2020 election, I was following what was going on with General Flynn and what he went through. Here's this decorated military hero and he says, you know, if you want to change what you've got, you have to get involved and you have to do it at the local level. And so I was like, Oh, no, no, no, not me. No. And then I had an opportunity to meet him. I just am a huge fan of his. He put it all on the line. He did service for our country. He was ready to die for us. And he sacrificed so much. And so he said the way to do it is to to run for school board. And I said, all right, I'm running for school board.

Patti O'Neill: Great. You have great qualifications to run for school board as well. So that's a great story to know that you were motivated by someone who said this is this is the the way that you impact change.

Pat Bradford: Grassroots level start at the school board. I never realized that school boards were so darn political. I thought everybody on a school board was there because they wanted to help children learn. And it's not so at all.

Reuel Sample: Your big thing is all about the children, but what is your top priority as you look at getting on the school board in New Hanover County?

Pat Bradford: Well, I'm a multitasker, so I have about four top priorities. I do. Because I think you can you can run this thing with four, four things at the same time that you want to accomplish. And there's four of us running that are conservatives. And I think we can I think we can do great things. I know we can do great things, but parents have lost their

voice. So parents first is big for me. They need to see the curriculum. They need to have a direct input in what's going on with their children on a day to day basis. And their choices have been taken away from them and they need to get them back. And I want the school board to more engage the parents, not less. I want the parents to have more voice, not less.

Patti O'Neill: Pat, do you think that parents have entrusted their children to the school system, thinking that the school board was acting in the parents and the children's best interest. And COVID 19 really opened a lot of eyes because people were seeing how children were learning with the online applications, and they were very surprised at what they were seeing. And if there was ever a silver lining of COVID and lockdowns and school closures, I do think that that's the case that parents were walking by their children doing online learning and they were seeing the teachers and they're thinking to themselves, what in the world?

Pat Bradford: Yes, you expressed that very well. I agree with you completely on that. So it was a silver lining. Not every household had Internet. Not every household had computers. So the learning loss was great, particularly in the in the lower socio economic households. And and those whose moms and grandmothers weren't in the house because they were out working. Great disparity happened there. Enormous learning loss. It's going to it's going to take years and years to recover from that.

Reuel Sample: So you've got your one is parents. What are the other three that you're going to be working on?

Pat Bradford: Safety. I absolutely do not want to be on this school board and have some horrendous thing happen. I want to make sure that we are as prepared as we possibly can for any disaster. As a business owner, I have always had a plan for storms, for fires, for all of that. We've done our drills. And those are the kind of things that I just they're innate with me.

Pat Bradford: And I've had the privilege. If we can talk about this now, I've had the privilege of going and sitting down with the incident commander who was in charge that day this year, when we had a shooting in the school. We didn't have a school shooter. It didn't come to murder all the children. He came to school, got in a fight. The fight got

worse. He he exited the space, came right back in with the gun and wounded. It looked to me like one of the boys he was in the fight with. You know, when all that scuffling is going on, it's hard to see. But we got to see a tiny bit of video, not all of it, because it's still an active case. Listen to all of the audio. And I was very impressed with our sheriff's department, our police department. Even Raleigh sent like 100 officers that got here in a nanosecond. The response was great.

Pat Bradford: I listened to the whole audio. I could find nothing to complain about, and I'm sort of an expert on listening to these things. I've listened to Uvalde, I've listened to Parkland, I've looked at Sandy Hook because I want to make sure that we're doing everything we can possibly do to make certain that this doesn't happen. And if someone is is is bent on doing it, that they're repelled and and it goes really well. And that's that's big for me.

Pat Bradford: Besides the mental health of our students, I want the physical safety of our students, but their mental health and that's an area that's really been the ball's been dropped on. A lot of these kids are traumatized from two years of no school, no friends, no no normal routine. And if high school is four years, they've lost half their high school. Some of them graduated without even being in the school. But at the same time, if you know me at all, you know that I am all about the four core subjects. We're graduating students who can't read, they can't write, and they can't add a column of figures. We're failing our students. Somebody criticized me and said, well, you don't care about science. Well, sure I do. But if you can't read, you can't do science.

Patti O'Neill: You can't you can't learn science if you can't read.

Reuel Sample: And you can't do science if you can't add.

Patti O'Neill: And you can't do science if you can't add because it's it's both it's the two.

Patti O'Neill: Exactly. And I knew a man who was an older he was he was my generation and he couldn't read and he he hid it so well. You had to really try to catch him at it and he'd say, well, well, you know, anyway, he couldn't read and he was so embarrassed. He was humiliated, his self-esteem was shot, and he was a businessman

running a company. And we don't need to be doing that in New Hanover County. Our kids our kids deserve better. Our families deserve better.

Patti O'Neill: So one of your goals would be to raise the level of proficiency in those areas in reading, writing, arithmetic, those sort of things. North Carolina instead of being in the basement as it relates to the 52 states. New Hanover County, right. To be in the top tier. And that's going to take some work because we're we're quite a ways down as it relates to our scoring and our testing.

Pat Bradford: It's a national problem. We're not unique. I'm not being critical per se. I'm just saying it's not good enough. One thing that you should know about me, if you've read the Wrightsville Beach magazine, if you ever looked at Lumina News, is my team operates in excellence. We strive for excellence and we are constantly trying to raise that bar everything we do. And I'm going to bring that to to to my time on the school board. I guarantee it.

Reuel Sample: Let's talk about your background in business a little bit, because nobody would call you a bean counter, but you are a numbers person. And this week, we we heard word about some incredible inflation numbers, 8.3% across the board, but we're talking about school board. But how does that inflation, how does the high cost of everything impact school spending?

Pat Bradford: From A to Z. So let's talk about Z and then we'll work back towards A - things that don't matter as much. But at some point when we get things straight and we stop losing students to all the other opportunities, when you make the school district excellent, the kids will come back. The parents won't have to homeschool. They won't have to pay the high tuition for their kids to be in a private school. And I'm a big fan of school choice. I'm a big fan of the money following the student. But that's another subject. Everything the school district pays for is affected. If they have to replace some drywall because it got wet in a storm or a window. It's going to cost 10% more if you can even get it. The Brogdon Hall floor redoing has cost a lot more money because of this inflation and there were two schools on the books. The plans had been approved or were in the approval process. Don't hold me to that to close. But we'd seen a one was at River Lights and what was the other one? Pine Valley.

Pat Bradford: And those have been tabled because of the high cost of what's going on and the declining student enrollment. So those two things but imagine here's the part that really bugs me y'all is. I mentored a kid who lived in Creekwood and his grandmother was raising him. And I know that she has just about this amount of money to feed him every week. If food's gone up this much, then he's maybe not getting as much food to eat every day. And a kid with an empty stomach that can't learn. It's just impossible. So we need to increase the the nutritional aspect of the school day, breakfast and lunch. And yet the federal government is trying to take away some of that. And that really bothers me because a kid who's hungry is not going to learn. And we have to equal out that. I know people say there's a disparity between this school and that school, but any child coming out of a strapped budget family is not going to be eating as much this next year as they were last year. It's just a fact.

Reuel Sample: How can you fix that Pat?

Pat Bradford: The programs that fund the nutritional aspect of our schools have to be ramped up. We're spending a lot of money. Now, you asked me about numbers. I'm not a bean counter. My father was a CPA, never even graduated high school, but he was a CPA. So I'm not a bean counter. I was dyslexic growing up and in school, so math was not my thing. And I know how limiting it is when you don't know how to do math, when you have to constantly use a calculator. I'm saying with the reading I couldn't read like other children until I got taught how to read as a dyslexic. But the budget has things in it that are concerning to me, where we can, I believe, shave one of the aspects of running a business this long. I went through the recession of 2008 and I learned how to ride that economic wave downward and stay in business and never had to fire anybody. And you can shave expenses. For example, I just opened up the phone bill here and said, Hey, Spectrum, hey, how can we get a lower rate here for the phones, for the Internet? And I shaved \$100 a month and that's 1200 dollars a year.

Pat Bradford: So if you do that, for every business vendor that you have, you know, you're going to have a better bottom line. And I believe we can do it with the school system. So go ahead and ask me about school safety again.

Pat Bradford: I think that we are paying more. I'm pretty darn sure we're paying more to have the ball fields, the grass cut on them than we are going to pay for the SRO

School Resource Officer Safety Resource Officers for this next year. And that bugs me. Why can't the civic groups get together and cut the grass on the ball field, the Boosters Club or whatever? And that would free up a half a million dollars that we could double what we're spending for the school resource officers. Those kind of things bug me and I'm going to have a plan to how to look at all of that and start to tweak it back so there's more money for the things that we need. I believe there's money in the budget that we could be spending on other things that that we don't need to be spending it on.

Patti O'Neill: Well, I would agree with you, Pat, on that as it relates to spending, because I was kind of going to dovetail into that as it relates to where is there wasteful spending. And I think what you just mentioned in regards to cutting the ball fields. Right. I like the idea of you being able to sit down and go through it line by line and assessing some value to each line item that we spend money on.

Pat Bradford: And I don't know that I would be able to get your line by line because it's about that many task force with four leaders and they each take a section. I'm not kidding. It's a bear of a document. And I've seen a lot of town budgets. And this one's not that easy to read. It's not a simple thing.

Patti O'Neill: Well, do you think that might be intentional?

Pat Bradford: I don't know.

Patti O'Neill: It's kind of hard sometimes when there's lots of snakes in the basket, so to speak. It's very hard to pick out a singular snake. Right. And it's done intentionally to to have people not move forward and try to get to the to the heart of the matter. And it sounds to me like you're really interested in getting to the heart of the matter and getting our money, the money that our taxpayers pay to benefit the children.

Pat Bradford: Yeah, absolutely. But it could be some of it could be innocuous because, you know, we had 43 phone lines at one time. We don't have that many anymore. But if you don't think, hey, wait, I've got to dial that service back, we're not using that. Even the Xerox copy machine that we have, we're not running nearly as many copies because our people work remotely. So I can cut that bill in half. It's just a matter of

thinking about it. And if you've been in business as long as the school district has, there's no talent where there's some waste there that they don't realize. Yeah, sure.

Reuel Sample: Wrapping things up here with Pat Bradford for school board here in New Hanover County,

I call it Board of Education.

Reuel Sample: Well, Board of Education - School Board - however you want to call it.

Pat Bradford: That's what will be on the ballot Board of Education.

Reuel Sample: How can people get in touch with you?

Pat Bradford: Oh, that's easy. My phone number is on everything. You know, I'm not afraid of people having my phone number. I have worked for years, years and years with poor homeless. Even this last couple of years. I did a little bit of work with with women, some of them who've been sex trafficked. And the thought is, oh, you don't put your phone number out there, they'll abuse it. It happens every now and then. But it's very rare and I love for people to contact me. So my phone number is out there, my email address is out there. I'm on Facebook, I'm on Instagram. I have a Twitter account, but don't look at that. I'm not social media is not really my thing. I'm a I'm a working person. I'm also a mom and a grandmother and a mentor to kids. And those things really play into all of this. My great grandson was just born and I thought, Oh, what a world you're facing, little one. You know, I got to do my part but my website is electpatbradford.com. Pretty simple. You can find me if you want to talk to me and I want to talk to people.

Pat Bradford: That's how I make up my mind on decisions. I take in all this information, then I filter it and I see. I see the value and everything people tell me. And then I make a decision. That's always been my decision making process.

Pat Bradford: There's one more thing I really want to say. I have heard that Congressman Ted Budd would like to make it easier for the military that are retired, the veterans, to get into the schools and work. And I just love that idea. One of the

problems in our school system right now is so many children are fatherless, they don't have positive role models. And my son's a first responder. He's a great dad. His father was a first responder. My daughter in law is a first responder. And they bring a certain level of professionalism and training that would make a great role model in the school. And we need more men volunteering in our schools. So I am all for that. I can't wait to talk to him about it, so I'm really excited about that. I just heard about it and it gave me hope.

Reuel Sample: I think that's a great idea. That's a great idea. Pat Bradford is one of four Republicans that we need to get on the school board. Four we need to get on there.

Pat Bradford: All four of us, to have the majority to make a difference other than before. Before being done. Yeah. All four.

Reuel Sample: All four. Pat Bradford, thank you again for joining us today.

Pat Bradford: You're welcome. It's been fun. Thank you.