



## **The NHC GOP Podcast**

*Episode 16: Defining The Republican Platform: John Bell, North Carolina House Majority Leader*

**Reuel Sample:** Better jobs, empowering students and family in education and fiscal responsibility. Welcome to the GOP podcast. I'm Reuel Sample with our very special guest, North Carolina House Majority Leader John Bell. John, how are you this morning, sir?

**John Bell:** It's great to be with you. I've looked forward to this and so glad we get a chance to have a conversation.

**Reuel Sample:** We've been looking forward to this for a long time. I'm going to jump right into it and let's get a big thing out of the way because Mike Lee's had to talk about it. Other people have been talking about it ever since the Supreme Court decided on Roe v Wade and sent this matter back to the states. We've been talking and had to address the the very important issue of abortion. We have been told over and over again that Republicans in North Carolina want to ban abortion outright. Let's get you on the record, John. What are the Republicans doing here in North Carolina?

**John Bell:** Well, first of all, I'll tell you, you know, when the Roe v Wade decision came out and no point in time was there ever a secret meeting or a secret caucus and a bill put forward and said, this is what we're going to do. And so the commercials you're seeing, the agenda is being pushed not just at the New Hanover County and state level, but also the national level is completely false. We frankly have not had the discussion

within our caucus. And so we have members that are on very different islands on this issue. It's a personal and emotional issue for a lot of our members, and it will be one that I'm sure that we'll discuss when we come in in January. But but right now, we have no agenda to ban abortion. We have no agenda to put this bill. We're going to lock people up, which is completely false. In the ads that have been ran down. There's nothing like that being done. Our folks are focused on winning over winning elections. And then once we come in, in the in the new session in January, we'll have a discussion and we'll find a common sense solution to hopefully both sides of the aisle will be able to work with and agree upon as we move forward. And it just it hurts my feelings when there's just, frankly, false ads running against really good representatives and really good senators that work for the people, not for an agenda. And to say that they're pushing an agenda, it's completely false.

**Reuel Sample:** There's there's campaigns and then there's campaigns. And the the amount of vitriol and mistruths that have been pushed out on this topic has been amazing. And so thanks for going on the record.

**John Bell:** Yeah, absolutely. And I will tell you, if you look at what was pushed in Congress and if you look at what my Democrat colleagues have said, they've made it very clear what they want to do. They want to have abortion on demand. They want to have abortion up to the moment of conception. They want to have taxpayer funded abortions. They want to have sexual selection, abortions, racial selection, abortions. That's what they want to do. They've made it very clear by vetoing legislation and really they made it very clear on the national scene, on bills they put forward. And so they've made it very clear that they want this agenda that, frankly, the majority of North Carolinians and frankly, the majority of most Americans do not support. The Democrats have made it very clear what they want to do. The Republican side does not have an agenda, has not even had the discussion yet within our caucus. And it will be one that we will have when we get back into Raleigh. But there's another hidden agenda on the abortion side.

**Reuel Sample:** And we're going to bring you and we're going to bring you and Michael Lee back on board when you folks start talking about that, because it is an important issue and we do need to talk.

**John Bell:** And it's an issue that not only it divides caucuses. So we'll have different views and opinions on the Republican side. We'll have different views and opinions of the Democrat side. We have pro-life Democrats as well. And then there'll be different views and opinions from the governor's office and also the Senate chamber. And so so to to say that there is this hidden agenda to push a narrative that frankly doesn't exist is completely false. And I'm disappointed that the governor would even jump on a TV ad to push that agenda against a center who has worked as hard as Mike Lee has for the folks of South and North Carolina, who's a great member of the North General Assembly and who serves the people that he represents, not not an agenda.

**Reuel Sample:** You're in the House. And so what are the what are North Carolinians concerned about? We've talked about abortion, but what are you hearing as you go about talking to people? What's first and foremost on people's minds?

**John Bell:** First and foremost? Every event we go to, every person I talk to, the text messages, the emails, the phone conversations, economy, economy, the economy. We're seeing gas start ticking back up. What the Biden administration has done to our energy efforts here in the country is just upsetting. When you look at almost a depleted oil reserve that is there for our national security. They're going to deplete it. When they're working with communist countries to try to bring in oil and gas into our country instead of tapping into the reserves that we have, that that is not only environmentally irresponsible, but it's also a threat to our national security. When people go to the grocery store and you have milk, five, \$6 a gallon when they go in to buy groceries and they don't get to get what they want, they have to get what's there. When you go in and you can't find blueberry pop tarts, when you go in and can't find Jif peanut butter, when you go in and and on your way there, you have to stop and get \$5 gas. That's what's on people's mind. With everything you deal with day in and day out has increased at a minimum of 10% or more. You know, I saw a statistic, I believe it was last week that said the average North Carolinian is paying almost 7 to \$800 more a month in basic supplies. And they were even a year ago.

**Reuel Sample:** 700 to \$800 more a month just for goods.

**John Bell:** When you look at a grocery bill and you go to the grocery store right now and what you could buy today is nowhere near what it cost a year ago, a year and a half

ago. And when you have a working family like mine, when you when you have a young I have a young daughter that's in school. I feel for the families that have three and four and five kids that are taking care of loved ones and are trying to manage this cost because they're getting hit everywhere they go. And this is nothing more than poor fiscal policies, poor decisions made out of our national government. Unfortunately, they've not taken the pathway of North Carolina. We've done great things here in our state to make our state fiscally responsible. We've introduced tax reform, we've introduced regulatory reform. We've done a lot of reforms to put reserves in place to protect our state. But we're having to deal with a very rogue national government that has flooded our has flooded our economy with frivolous spending. And they want to continue to do more of it. And that has to stop or else we will be I just get I just get stunned when I watch the news. I mean, we've got a vice president that doesn't know the difference between North and South Korea. We've got a president that goes down to Florida, where Governor DeSantis has done an outstanding job navigating through a very difficult situation with the hurricane and who's laughing and joking and and making inappropriate comments. We've got we've got a House of Representatives where the speaker of the House in Washington is not even allowing people to come back in and vote. They're still voting remote.

**Reuel Sample:** They're still voting remote?

**John Bell:** Still voting remote, you've got a dysfunctional government that is completely out of touch with everyday Americans. And it's like the old saying the economy, stupid. That's exactly what people are talking about. For every part that I was in the western part of the state earlier, earlier this week, they're talking about the economy there. I'm back in eastern North Carolina. We're talking about the economy here. And I think within the next couple of weeks, we're going to see gas get back to \$4 a gallon. And it just looks like a never ending cycle.

**Reuel Sample:** You know, I used to work in Washington, D.C., and every time I left the Beltway, I could feel my IQ rise just because when we talk about the whole idea of Washington, D.C. being out of touch, that's that's not just blowing smoke. They're out of touch in Washington, D.C. and they really don't even know what's going on even here close in North Carolina.

**John Bell:** If you went to Washington, D.C. today, you would be shocked. Just arriving in the city. I was there a few months back and the the street vendors that were once there no longer there. The hustle and bustle population, people still haven't come back to work. People have refused to come back into the city because of crime. It's definitely nothing like what it was when Donald Trump was in office. When Donald Trump was in office, you went to D.C. People were excited to be there. It was it happened in place. There were vendors. People were making money. Life was good. And now it's a depressing, depressing place to get it.

**Reuel Sample:** You've talked about fiscal responsibility here in North Carolina and the things that you have done in North Carolina, not just for the last two years under President Biden, but even before then, reducing taxes, getting our fiscal house in order. I lived for a while in the great Volunteer state of Tennessee, where we had no state income tax. And there are other states across the Southeast that are financially sound that have no state income tax. You've reduced the state income tax here in North Carolina, but what are your future plans for that?

**John Bell:** So what we looked at many years ago, and I want to give credit to a number of people that helped help make this happen. Senator Thom Tillis, when he was speaker of the House, took on the endeavor of doing tax reform here. The state representative, Julia Howard, out of Derby County was our finance chair. A number of other people that were involved but helped lead the charge to to really take a look at how we do taxes here in North Carolina, because we were one of the top we're one of the top states in the country for highest tax rates. We had the highest tax rate in the Southeast. When you look at companies that were they were leaving North Carolina, we had extremely high corporate tax. And so so we re-evaluated that. And what you have to do in this process is not do what the state of Kansas did. They just flat out cut taxes. Great idea. They didn't reduce spending. They didn't do it in a way that is manageable. And so when they did that, they cut taxes, did not cut spending, did not look at regulations and basically turn their state in spiral out of control. It was our really bad fiscal situation.

**John Bell:** In North Carolina, we took a strategic approach. And so we have trigger mechanisms built in. So I believe our tax rate when I first started was 7.75. Today it's around four. And every time we have a surplus, you see a trigger kick in that cuts to

state income tax. And so we're doing incrementally as we move along. At the same time, the corporate tax is moving to zero. At the same time, we're we're not frivolous spending in our state. So so we're spending under control. Cuts are made when needed. And also at the same time, it's very hard to do a tax reform when you do not do regulatory reform. At the same time, you have to cut out a senseless regulation. So we've done a meaningful, measured approach on how we address all of those. And the result is what you see today. You see a booming economy, you see our state income tax continue to reduce. Our goal is to get it to zero. It's going to be a very strategic in how we do that, because if we do if we do hit a recession, I believe we're in a recession now. But our friends in Washington have changed the definition.

**John Bell:** So we'll see what that. But I mean, when we do hit a recession, our state will be prepared. And so if we do not have surpluses in our budget, we will not lower taxes. So so we're actually moving in an incremental direction to get it to zero. So it is sustainable. The last thing you want to do is drastically reduce taxes, not be able to cover the expenses and the cost of running the state. So it's a very meaningful, measured, responsible approach. I like the direction we're going and people will continue seeing that those trigger mechanisms kick in. And our state is now the number one state to do business. We've got moving trucks moving in. You all have experienced that in New Hanover County. It's a popular place to be. I'm a UNCW graduate. I get down there as much as I can. People love coming down to South or North Carolina. People are moving into our state. Company announcements every week are happening in North Carolina and we want to keep up that effort. We believe that if people have more money in their pocket, they have a better idea of how they want to spend their funds than the government does.

**Reuel Sample:** It's their money.

**John Bell:** But it is their money. It's your money. The money that that government received from the people needs to be spent in a responsible, meaningful, measured way that that benefits all the people. And you've seen us really do that, especially in the last couple of years, where we invested in tremendous amounts of infrastructure. Those are long lasting projects water, sewer, broadband connectivity down in New Hanover County. You've seen a tremendous effort put in to the ports, to education, and those are

meaningful projects that affect all North Carolinians and are actually long term projects that could go 30 and 40 years out.

**Reuel Sample:** The things that we talked about as I introduced you, things like better jobs, empowering students and families through education, fiscal responsibility. These are all traditional Republican ideas. But in the last couple of years, we have seen those ideals resound with a greater demographic, is that people are are latching on to those ideas. Even people who have never been affiliated with the Republicans, they are seeing that way. Why is that going on? What is happening?

**John Bell:** Well, for me, I think you've got a great awakening of what's going on. You've got a party out of Washington, D.C. that that is completely detached from everyday Americans. You know, to me, this is nothing new. I grew up with if you have \$5 or something called \$6, you didn't buy it. It just didn't work. And and I grew up in a household that my. Our father expected me to work. And even when I was unable to to have a job at a young age, I had tours of the house I had to do. I had responsibilities, know if I wanted if I wanted lunch for school fixed during the week, I had had two working parents. I had to make my own lunch. If I wanted my clothes washed, I had to get that done. And so my parents instilled in me a hard work ethic, which was later on in life, I learned the hard way. I had a really good time my first year at UNC W and came back home and had to work at the tobacco field and it was my choice to continue work in that field or go make something of myself. So I chose to go back to school and focus on my grades.

**John Bell:** But, you know, this is what everyday North Carolinians face and they see it in their household incomes or household budgets, and they know what they can afford and what they can't afford. And when you're seeing policies that from a party that are just so out there, I mean everything now on the Democrat side is is either race baiting or identity politics. I mean, when you have a member that's going to be on our United States Supreme Court, they can't define what a woman is. When you look at the indoctrination and the issues that are being forced upon our kids and our schools, when you look at the the ridiculous amount of frivolous baiting that's been thrown out there, there's repercussions to all this. And the average person is now waking up. They understand, especially come out of COVID, where you had a rogue government come in and try to shut everything down. I believe in in Hanover County, you even had

business owners that were arrested and charged for trying to operate their businesses. People don't support that. And coming out of COVID. Everyday parents got to see what was happening in our classroom to see what was going on with the digital learning.

**John Bell:** And then and the fact that we had labor unions trying to keep our schools shut down to try to harm our kids. And so you're seeing this great awakening. People are aware of what's going on our county commission. They're aware of what's going on our city councils. They're absolutely aware of what's going on our school boards now, and they're paying attention. I'll tell people, as Republicans for many years we went to work, we raised our families. We did what we were supposed to do, participate in our community. A lot of people didn't focus on politics. And we've allowed people get into politics that frankly, are pushing an agenda, not the best interest of the people they serve. And I told you earlier, I don't like being called a politician. I'm a public servant. I serve at the will of the public. They are my boss, whether they're Republican, Democrat, unaffiliated voter or not, though those are the people that I answer to every day when I'm in Raleigh and we have a huge number of people that are stepping up to the plate to be public servants. And that's going to be the difference this election.

**Reuel Sample:** We have a Democrat governor. We do have a majority North Carolina Republicans, but we need a larger majority. We're sending two folks back up your way? Well, we want to we want to send we send Ted Davis, but we've got two great candidates down here. Tell me about them and why is it important that we get more Republicans into that?

**John Bell:** Well, we've we've done a really good job of of recruiting candidates that reflect the interests of the areas. And so when you look at down in New Hanover County, Ted Davis served on the county commission. He understands the community. He was born and raised there, a long time business leader, very active in the community. He understands the needs of New Hanover County and he's done an outstanding job even having to go against some of some of our folks in the party with the with the film tax credits and issues that are important to New Hampshire County. Ted has stood there in the Gap and fought for his constituents. He needs to come back to Raleigh. He does an outstanding job. He's our head of judiciary chair, a very important position in the House, and he represents his community well. Charlie Miller has a young gun. He doesn't have any opposition coming out of Brunswick County, has



a small piece of New Hanover County. But Charlie has really hit the ground running, has jumped in because of my law enforcement and school board background. Those are vital to the decisions that will be making moving forward. When you look at the efforts from the other side to our classrooms to defunding the police, it's nice to have somebody there that understands that day in and day out repercussions of their ridiculous policies.

Then you've got probably one of the better candidates that we've recruited all across the state in John Hinnant. Man, what a fireball. John is working hard. I'm on a text message chain with John. He's sending me updates. I watched the ABA, the Chamber of Commerce briefing the leaders for he did. He was sharp. He knew the issues. He knew what was going on in the community, whether it be downtown, whether it be out in the county. He understood the issues affecting the poorest, the film industry, the university, our school system, really, really dynamic individual. And he's going to give his opponent, Deb Butler, a run a run for her money.

**John Bell:** It's interesting I get to see some of the ads that come through and some of these extreme liberal Democrats now are running ads that make them sound like Republicans. And it was very interesting. I saw an ad that popped up nowhere where I believe represent the Butler, talked about working across the aisle and and being kind and being nice because we're all in this together. After thinking she made her name by screaming and yelling on the House floor. She's never voted for anything part of the bipartisan. Refuses to work with us. I don't even know if she's even supported a budget. I have to go back and look at her voting record. But her voting record is day in and day out progressive, liberal, Democrat. And to see her running ads trying to portray that she's a moderate, it's completely false.

**John Bell:** And John's brought that to the surface about, hey, we need somebody that's going to work for all people and not just a small segment of the population. And so he's a great candidate. I think that race is going to be a whole lot closer than what people think. And it's my hope and we're investing in that race and we're working hard with John and Ted to get them both across the finish line.

**John Bell:** And then you've got a really good friend of mine, Senator Michael Lee. This man, what a dynamic individual. I've known Michael for a long time. His wife is from the

Kinston area, which I used to represent over in Lenoir County. And so we've become really good friends. Michael is a outstanding senator. He's an independent thinker. He works hard. You see him day in and day out trying to balance a private sector job, serving his community and and helping support his family. And so he puts a lot of time, energy and effort into making sure that his constituents are heard. And so southeastern North Carolina is very blessed by the representation that they have and the fact that you have an opportunity to pick up a gentleman by the name of John Hinnant, it really can make a dynamic group down there in New Hanover County.

**Reuel Sample:** John Hinnant has been out knocking on doors.

**John Bell:** He's a machine! I've done so much talking and back and forth across the state. I've lost part of my voice. Whenever John was dragged into more, not to go day in and day out. And he has actually raised the bar for our candidates down that way. And so I'm excited about what he's doing.

**Reuel Sample:** I think he's on his fifth pair of sneakers. I think he's he's he's he's worn out so many going out and talking to people.

**John Bell:** You know what? That's what you want. You want somebody that is going to knock on doors, is willing to go talk to the people they represent. That is saying, hey, look, this is where we're at. I'm providing an alternative solution to better our community. That is no different than what we did in 2010 when we took the majority. We said, look, the state's been under Democrat control for 130 plus years. Just give us a chance. Just give us a chance and we can show you what the conservative Republicans can do. And. And I'm proud to say that our state's better off. The numbers, all the numbers are the numbers show that our state is better off than we were 12 years ago under Democrat control when Beverly Perdue was governor and you had to super majority of the Democrats in both houses.

**Reuel Sample:** North Carolina House Majority Leader John Bel. You're not running for re-election in our area.

**John Bell:** I am running for reelection. It feels like we run every year and a half the first time in eight years. I do not have any opposition, which is nice. I do have a responsibility

to do everything I can to help get Republicans elected across the state. We've got a great leadership team. I'll just tell you, Ted Davis is part of that team. Charlie Miller is a part of that team on the house. You've got Representative Jim Dixon, which covers Duplin and Onslow County right now as part of that team. Representative Jason Saine. Representative Dustin Hall. Representative Brennan Jones, a tremendous group of folks all across the state, Representative Sarah Stevens, Representative Steve Tyson over and in Craven County, Representative Matthew Winslow over in Franklin County. We've even got the lone Republican in Wake County, Representative Aaron Parr, stepping up to the plate. You've got a lot of people working as hard as they can to get Republicans elected. The speaker and I have been crisscrossing the state. He's been a dynamic cheerleader for us. And I was talking with him this morning and we were raising money for a things more than 8:30, 9:00 I'm going after it. And so it's going to be a great November 8th for us. I know I'm ready for it to be over. We're like most everybody. We've got a few more days in a couple of weeks left before early voting.

**John Bell:** So we just need to go ahead and work as hard as we can and do everything we can to raise the funds to to get these folks across the finish line. And I'll just tell your listeners and viewers. These races are expensive. We have one race in the state that we've budgeted \$906,000 for it, and so almost a million dollars for a House seat. And two of those expensive races on the House side are going to be right there in New Hanover County. And New Hanover County is going to be the difference in our statewide elections. So when you look at the two seats on the state Supreme Court and the seats up on the Court of Appeals, New Hanover County is going to be the difference. And we need folks in New Hanover County to turn out. We need folks in all 100 counties will turn out and vote for the conservatives on the state Supreme court that are running. They're actually judges that follow the rule of law and follow the Constitution as written. You've seen what's happened in our state Supreme Court is going rogue, pushing an agenda. The voters of the state clearly said that they want a voter ID law, they want in their constitution. And we've got four extreme liberals in our state Supreme Court has said, you know what? We know better than the hundreds of thousands of voters here in the state, and it is time to stop that.

**John Bell:** We need to put people on the court that follow the rule of law, that do not push an agenda and follow our Constitution as written. And you've got two outstanding candidates in Richard Deitz and Trey Allen that will do just that. We can we can pick up

more seats on the state court of appeals, which we will do. We've got you've got Congressmen Rouzer running for reelection down that way. David's done an outstanding job. He was my senator when I first started in politics and I'm a state senator. And then we got an opportunity to and frankly, our opportunity to pick a majority and the United States Senate with Ted Budd on the ballot. So law at the national level that are very important. But I also know that most important in New Hanover County, I see the blogs and see what's going on. But folks, after you vote for the courts and after you vote for the folks running statewide, your local elections, county commissioner, school boards, we really need people to step up. We've got great people down there running for office and want to stand up not just for the kids, but also for working families and families in general. And they need your support as well. So it's a full court press from now to November to eight. And I believe we're going to have a great election and we're going to see major change throughout our state.

**Reuel Sample:** I'll tell you what, I've been I've been doing this for a long time, and people think of the Grand Old Party is that tired old party? But we ain't tired.

**John Bell:** No, we're not tired. And when we were recruiting candidates, I kept on here, and I'll just be blunt, I hear are nothing but a bunch of old white guys. I'm like, Look, first of all, I'm not old. Second of all, the candidates that we've recruited resemble their communities. We have the most diverse slate of candidates that we've ever had. And I challenge our candidate recruitment to anybody across the country. We've got people that that are that are putting their personal lives and business lives aside, saying, hey, it's time to step up and run. And they're from all backgrounds, all different races, all different ways of life are stepping up and running for office. The right thing to do. I couldn't be prouder of the House candidates that have put their name on the line and are running for office today.

**Reuel Sample:** Leader John Bel. How can they get in touch with you?

**John Bell:** Our office is always open. Just please reach out to us online, social media channels. We try to manage all that. My communications director tells me I can't touch the Twitter or social media because I messed it up so everyone goes through him. But our office is pretty open. If he needs anything, we try to help direct them to the right place. And so we're here to serve the public. Regardless of if you're in the district,

outside the district, whether you vote for me or not, vote for me. We're here to serve you because that's our job.

**Reuel Sample:** Sure do appreciate you being here. We could sit and talk all day, but you've got things to do. We've got folks to go out and talk to. John, thanks for being here.

**John Bell:** Thank you very much. Enjoyed it.