



The NHC GOP Podcast

Episode 15: Restoring Common Sense in Government – Re-elect Michael Lee to North Carolina State Senate

Reuel Sample: Restoring common sense to the North Carolina legislature. Good morning and welcome to the NHC GOP Podcast. I'm Reuel Sample, along with my very special guest, Senator Michael Lee. Good morning, Senator. How are you?

Michael Lee: Good. I hope you're doing well.

Reuel Sample: Doing great. The fall has moved in and it is getting cold outside. So that's that's my kind of weather. Let's get right into it. Let's touch on a subject real quickly and then we can move on to some real meaningful stuff. Yesterday, you dropped a lawsuit against Marsha Morgan. Can you tell us what's going on with that?

Michael Lee: Sure. You know, in society today, whether it's elected officials or candidates, you know, people seem to be of the mind that they can do and say whatever they want, whether it's true or not. And as public officials, that happens a fair amount. But usually they're saying things about, you know, your position on an issue may not be true. And so I've developed some thick skin through the years. But when you're going to just make up things and facts about somebody's business, what they do for a living, you know, that crosses the line. And so if we don't start pushing back on people that are going to do these kinds of things, then it's just going to get worse. And so every once in a while you really have to push back because it does impact people and their personal lives. It has impacted me and my law firm and my law practice. And

so those are the times in which you really need to make sure that you push back because real damage is caused.

Reuel Sample: In your statement to various newspapers, you said that this has crossed the line into talking about your partners and other people that are affected. You're a politician, you've got thick skin, but when it crosses that line, that's when you've got to fight back a little bit.

Michael Lee: Yeah. What person is going to want to get into public service? If you can talk about things that say things that aren't true about what you do for a living or say that you're committing crimes, no one is going to want to get into elected office. Now, again, you know, talk about positions, talk about those kinds of things. But, you know, there is a point at which you cross a line. And when someone crosses a line, you need to make sure that you hold them accountable.

Reuel Sample: Well, this is an active lawsuit and so we can't go too much into it. And I can respect that. And and I wish you all the best in that. But let's move on. Is that as part of all this is that there's an unprecedented amount of money being spent by your opponents against you here in New Hanover County, New Hanover County. What's going on is, Senator, and why are they sinking so much money here?

Michael Lee: Yeah, you know, it's it's pretty unbelievable. You know, I think I was told because you can look up how much people are spending. I was told they're spending around \$200,000 a week on television. And so that's put that in the context. Usually a very well funded campaign in this area, spending around 50,000 a week, usually probably about three, two and a half months from the election, usually starting right after Labor Day, sometimes right before. But, you know, they're on track to spend two or three times more than they ever have before. And this is a target district in the North Carolina Senate. And so they're going to keep it up. They're going to keep doing things and keep saying things until Election Day, and they're going to keep putting things in the mail. And it's not just my opponent. It's third party groups. We saw an ad the governor came in and and has been posting an ad on television, which I'm sure a lot of people have seen. So, you know, that's just part of the game as far as all the money coming in. But it's certainly I'm not sure what I did to upset somebody because it's certainly a lot of money.

Reuel Sample: You're out talking to people and what are you hearing from them? What are people concerned about and how are you going to address those things?

Michael Lee: Yeah, you know, people are really concerned about inflation. People are really concerned about crime. And and people want to know my position on abortion, which I put out in an op ed September 3rd, and all the ads that are out there saying kind of the opposite of what I said in the op ed. But people are really concerned about inflation right now. And I think it's getting worse. And a lot of folks ask us, well, what are you going to do? And I point people back to 2009 when we were hitting that Great Recession. We were had a structural deficit of two and a half billion dollars, which means we were spending two and a half billion more than what we were taking in on a budgetary basis. So they were stealing money from the Highway Trust Fund and other areas. We had essentially no rainy day fund, less than \$200 million. We owed the federal government billions of dollars. And so we were in real trouble back then. And so what what Republicans have tried to do over the last decade and something that I've been proud to be a part of is we've been building up our rainy day reserve. We have almost \$5 billion in our rainy day reserve. In 2008, because we didn't have any money in savings, we had a structural deficit. The legislature had to cut essential services. They froze teacher salaries. They did all of these draconian things that if if their if they had budgeted and taken care of their fiscal house, that would not have occurred.

Michael Lee: We have \$1,000,000,000 in an inflationary reserve to help with increased salaries and recruiting for four state agencies so we can continue to provide those essential services. We have over \$3 Billion in our unemployment reserve so we don't have to rely on the federal government like the state did years ago. And what a lot of people don't understand is, is unemployment insurance is paid through unemployment premiums that small businesses pay. And so if we've got a good fiscal house when it comes to those issues, it helps small business. So there's a lot we've been doing in North Carolina, whether it's \$1,000,000,000 in a broadband expansion expansion or a pay as you go approach for capital projects. You know, back in in a previous decade, they used to borrow all their money. And now what we've been able to do as a state is kind of a pay as you go. So a lot of these projects you're seeing happening and universities and other places, we're able to pay them as we go on rather than taking on these big bond issues and debt. And so what that means is that our fiscal house is in

order. We don't have to raise taxes. And in fact, we've been lowering them. We'll be down under 4% within the next five or six years. I can't remember exactly how long that phase in program is, but we're one of the lowest tax rates in the Southeast for states that have a tax.

Reuel Sample: And less taxes means more money that people can spend to put back into the economy so that our economy can grow. It just makes simple economic and mathematical sense. So in the midst of this inflation, you folks have been getting your house in order so that the state of North Carolina can weather this economic downturn until we can turn things around.

Michael Lee: Yeah, and, you know, not just weather it, but actually continue to succeed, you know, because our fiscal house is in order, because we've had good tax policy, because we've done things in a smart way. We're seeing businesses run to North Carolina. We've improved our regulatory environment, which lowers costs for not just businesses, but consumers. And so we've got the ability to thrive when other states are really trying to retrench, raising taxes, cutting back on essential services. We're not going to have to do those things because of the planning that we put into it.

Reuel Sample: You are out talking to people. And all across the country, we are seeing the message of Republicans resound not only with Republicans, but independents and unaffiliates from the economy, inflation, high gas prices to parental rights and everything else. Why do you think people are starting to resound or to to understand the Republican message.

Michael Lee: I think because it just makes common sense in light of all the other things going on. I think over time people have become more aware of what has been transpiring. And some of that has to do with the pandemic. People had the opportunity to see what was going on in schools, in some schools through Zoom and actually being in the classroom, although virtually with their children and hearing what was going on. And then when they wanted to request information that a really hard time getting the information. And so parents and families have really been concerned about those things. Senator Ballard, Burger and I brought forth the Parent's Bill of Rights, which allowed parents information. You could always already request information, but in some school districts it was really hard to get that information. So we laid out a real program

on a timeline and how you were able to get information from schools and also that required schools to tell you about your child's mental and physical health. I never thought we needed a law to require schools to make sure they were informing parents of certain things going on in schools and making sure there was age appropriate information being taught to our five, six and seven year olds. So I think a lot of people didn't realize those things were going on. Now they know that they're going on. And so that's why you see a lot of folks really kind of mobilizing on what's a real common sense agenda. And I think that really resonates with a lot of folks.

Reuel Sample: You know, if I got in trouble at school, it was the wrath of the teacher, but then it was also more the wrath of my father when I got home, you know, and the thought of the school hiding all that stuff when I was a student, that probably would have been really great. But as a as a parent, to know that that your kids are getting away with things at school, that's just that's that's that's alien to me.

Michael Lee: Well, I mean, it's not it's not even disciplinary. I mean, it's mental health and health. Those are things that that I think we took for granted that were going on. And and as we got into the pandemic, I think we saw some school districts would withhold certain information from parents irrespective of age. And so parents have a right to know what's going on with their child in school if it affects their mental health or physical health or grades discipline, they have a right to know. Some schools do a good job, some schools don't. And so this Parents Bill of Rights that we put forth was really just kind of level set and say, okay, everyone needs to be doing at least this. And and schools could do more, but they need to at least be doing this to make sure that parents are being informed and have the ability to participate in their in their child's education and the time in which they're entrusting to to the various schools.

Reuel Sample: You are talking about common sense today with us. We've seen it on your in your campaign. Why is common sense missing today and why is it so important to bring common sense back to the legislative process?

Michael Lee: You know, unfortunately, because, you know, there's a lot of messages out there that. That talk about all kinds of different things. And at the end of the day, most people boil things down to just what is common sense and what is practical. And you see those on the extremes that try and inflame people. And it and it really turns a lot

of folks off, to be honest with you. A lot of people want to hear common sense solutions to real world problems. And unfortunately, a lot of politicians and a lot of candidates don't talk about it. And those of us who do talk about it, a lot of times we don't always get the airplay because it's not wild and crazy. It's more common sense, practical. You know, when someone said, What are you going to do about inflation? Well, you know, it's hard to fight what the federal government has done to us. But the common sense says that we've been planning for this for a very long time through our rainy day fund, our tax policy, our regulatory structure, so that we could not only weather the storm from a lack of revenue, but we could keep attracting businesses to our area to make sure that average weekly wage is staying up, that we have good paying jobs that are still coming to our area. So if we do have some businesses that are closing, we've got a good number of businesses that are still coming here. And so that takes planning. It's like if you've got a small business or anything else, if you plan appropriately, you can be successful. A lot of politicians just plan on two year cycles for elections. That's not what I do. That's not what a lot of my colleagues do who are really good policymakers. But unfortunately, sometimes that's not the most exciting thing to hear about, that you're saving money or or or attracting businesses through revising your regulatory structure. So.

Reuel Sample: So good legislation like common sense doesn't often fit in a tweet. It takes some time to get out there. And it also can't fit into a 20 minute podcast. So how can they find out more about you, Senator, and support your campaign? Get in touch with you.

Michael Lee: You can go to leefornc.com. You can find out about me and the campaign. You can go to Port City. Port City Daily's website asked us a whole bunch of questions. Myself and Marsha, the Star News did the same thing. So those questionnaires are out there and you can kind of see what we've done, what we've accomplished and what we're looking to do in the future. You know, these things don't fit into a soundbite. And so that makes it tough. It makes it easy if you don't know what you're talking about or you haven't done anything, makes it hard. If you've done some things and you know what you're talking about.

Reuel Sample: Senator Michael Lee, I know you're very busy. I appreciate you joining us on here and all the best in your campaign. We look forward to sending you back to Raleigh.

Michael Lee: Thank you. I appreciate the time this morning.