



The NHC GOP Podcast

Episode 24: Election Wrap-Up: Conversation with NHC GOP Chairman Will Knecht

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Reuel Sample: Welcome to the NHC GOP podcast. I'm Reuel Sample joined by our county chair Will Knecht. Good morning, Will. How are you today?

Will Knecht: It's great to be with you. I'm excited. Just a handful of days before Election Day. This is what we're built for. And so it's game time. Go time and our team of volunteers and our candidates are out working their tails off so that we might have great results on November 8th.

Reuel Sample: Early voting has been going on. The final vote is on Tuesday. How important is it that Republicans get out and vote?

Will Knecht: I tell you what it is, it's absolutely critical. You look at the vote totals each and every morning. We're being outvoted overall, as you relate it's early voting. The one stop and the absentees, we're being outvoted by the Democrats, anywhere between 500,000 and 1000 votes. We're just barely ahead of the unaffiliated voter. And every vote's going to matter. Every single vote is going to matter. And I just pray that concerned conservatives and folks who are just not real happy with the direction that

our county, our state and our country are going, regardless of the affiliation, whether they be a Republican, unaffiliated or even some of our conservative Democrats or Democrats who are fed up with their own party. And the lack of results that the Democrats are showing in Raleigh and in D.C. and even here locally on boards like our school board and board of commissioners. So every vote's important. And I just pray that every voter gets out there, every registered voter. Wouldn't it be great if we had 100% participation and the citizens of New Hanover County decided who their elected leaders were? So, again, if you're a Republican, if you're leaning Republican as an unaffiliated voter or you're a Democrat, a little bit disgusted with what you're seeing out of your party's leadership and you're beginning to question, is this really working for me? I just encourage every single person to get out there and vote. I'll never forget my first election as county chair was 2019. It was the municipal elections. We were electing the mayor and three city councilman. And as you know, city council is a tough, tough race for is typically and at the end of the day, on election Day in 2019, our Republican had a five vote lead, I believe, over the fourth place finisher, a Democrat, and it went to a recount.

Will Knecht: And if my memory serves me correct, Neal Anderson, a Republican, was elected to the city council in 2019 by four votes.

Reuel Sample: Wow.

Will Knecht: And so every single vote matters. 2018, Michael Lee lost the Senate race, the North Carolina state Senate race to a failed politician. But Michael lost by just about 200 votes. That's the nature of New Hanover County. We have more unaffiliated voters by far than Republicans and Democrats who are really close in the registration. So, again, I'm rambling now. But again, every single vote matters. If you're listening to this and you haven't voted yet, if you're watching us and you haven't voted yet. I encourage you to vote. Go to our website: NewHanoverGOP.org. You'll see right on our homepage, data and information. A click away on everything you need to know about early voting, which ends at, I think, 3:00 on Saturday and then Election Day in the 43 precincts that you vote at. You'll find sample ballots you can print out and bring with you to the polls. We'll have volunteers at every polling location to give you more information. But if you haven't voted yet, please get out there and vote. And if you have voted, make sure you text and call and speak with every conservative friend you have to make sure

they get out and vote. Whoever gets the vote out, whichever side the progressives or the conservatives, whichever side is able to mobilize their voters, will win this election. There is no such thing as a red wave in New Hanover County. It is vote by vote and it is going to be a dogfight. And I believe many of our races locally will be extremely close. And possibly those four vote margins could make a difference.

Reuel Sample: So Republicans need to show up. They need to show up. We need to show up and get out. What are the big issues that folks are talking about that go across party lines that that that our candidates are talking about?

Will Knecht: There are three things that I'm hearing. Again, you and I have doorknocked a lot. We've talked to a lot of voters. We both work the polls and we hear what folks are saying. And again, this is not partisan. Affordability is the number one issue that we hear and hear when you go to the gas pump. And it's a ridiculous price. It's one buck, a buck 50 more than it was just two years ago. That hits you and me in our pocketbook every single time I go to the gas station and fill my little 16 gallon tank up, you know, there's an extra \$16, \$20 that I didn't have to spend on gas just two years ago that now is coming out of my limited bank account. And then I go to the grocery store and I hear this, the affordability at the grocery store. Eggs 4.99. When a couple of years ago. They're two bucks. Your grocery bill. So the number one issue is affordability. And it's hitting us directly every single day, every week at the grocery store and at the gas station. That's top of mind.

Will Knecht: The second thing that I think voters across party lines are talking about is safety is law and order. It is feeling safe in our communities, feeling safe when we go outside, feeling confident that our kids are safe in school. And again, the other side just boggles the mind, the leadership on the other side and even some of the local candidates on the Democrat side are defund the police people. Are you kidding me? Yeah.

Reuel Sample: You need to fund the police in order to have safety. They need they need the funds in order to do what they need to do.

Will Knecht: It is a fundamental job of government. A lot of things government does they shouldn't be doing. But one thing the government should be doing is keeping you and I as citizens safe. So I think crime is that second issue that I'm hearing a lot about.

Will Knecht: And then the third thing from parents and grandparents, again, non-partisan across party lines is parents and grandparents want control back of their kids education. They want to say in what their kids are learning. They want their kids, their grandkids, to be prepared upon high school graduation to either attend college with the basic reading, writing, math, civics, nailed, right, prepared, ready to attend college, and also parents and grandparents whose kids are not college bound but are trade oriented. They're great working with their hands. They want them ready for the trades and our trades desperately need them. We talk about good paying jobs. Boy Oh boy. In the construction industry. In the development industry. In the real estate industry. They are dying for plumbers, electricians, masons. And these are jobs that pay 30, \$40,000 at 18, 19 years old.

Reuel Sample: To start!

Will Knecht: Phenomenal opportunity. So anyway, the three issues we're hearing are affordability, especially at the gas pump and at the grocery store. We're hearing about safety and crime and we're hearing about parents and grandparents wanting the say in their kids education. Those are the three issues.

Reuel Sample: What I find interesting is that because our candidates across the board, we're going to talk about them briefly here shortly, is that because they're talking about these issues, they are called extremists and they're called radicals where these are just really common sense issues where people are hurting and they need answers.

Will Knecht: If I was a Democrat strategist, I would just be wringing my hands. They have two issues that they run on. They have two issues. One is fear mongering. And again, to your point, painting common sense foundational issues as extreme. Parents having the control of their kids education? That's not extreme. You and I feeling safe in our communities? That is not extreme. And being able to afford our gas and our groceries? Not extreme, but that's what the Democrats are running on. You look locally at the lies being thrown at State Senator Michael Lee. \$300,000 just announced going

to his opponent from liberal Michael Bloomberg in New York. Why would Michael Bloomberg care about North Carolina state Senate seat seven? But he's pounding. He's putting 300,000. Extremist message. And then the second message is abortion. That's it. That's all they've got.

Reuel Sample: That's all they've got.

Will Knecht: They're not talking about the issues that the citizens care about that you and I care about. And again, these issues that we care about, affordability, safety and parental choice, they're they're not a Republican issue. They are issues that everybody cares about and the Democrats are so off message. It's crazy. But our candidates, to their credit, are speaking directly to the issues that impact the residents of New Hanover County. And I tell you what, how proud I am to work for every single Republican candidate that we have up and down the ballot. It is an honor. These are good people. These are good women and men who care about kids, who care about families, who care about taxpayers. And it's an honor to work for them.

Reuel Sample: Let's talk about those races. At the national level we've got a Senate seat up and we've got a House seat, of course, Ted Budd in the Senate. David Rouzer for for the House. Let's talk about those two men.

Will Knecht: Absolutely. And Ted Budd, is the race that's much more in focus because it's a tougher race to replace. It's an open seat. So it's all hands on deck. Right. And it's been very, very tight in the polling. Ted Budd is a guy, congressman who is a small business owner. He's strong 2A, he's pro-family, pro parent, wanting to make things more affordable. He's for a strong border protection border wall. And he comes to Wilmington all the time. All he you know, he was in Wilmington just last week or earlier this week.

Reuel Sample: Yeah. And just earlier this week, just a couple of days ago.

Will Knecht: Things are so blurred right now. Things just this week he spent a few hours with us, came to our headquarters. We had a standing room only crowd. So Congressman Budd is working his tail off. He's been to all 100 counties. And again, he's speaking about the issues that matter to residents of New Hanover County, and he's

dealing with them directly. And so, again, a great man. He served our country well as a member of Congress. And I think it looks good. But again, every vote is going to matter in that race. You remember Cheri Beasley just lost a statewide race just two years ago for Chief Justice of the Supreme Court by 400 votes. So she has name I.D. for her. She has millions and millions and millions of dollars coming in from New York and California and D.C. to support her campaign, but feel really good about the work Ted, Ted Budd has done. And it's an important race. It could come down to that seat to see who has 51 votes come November 9th in the Senate to to hopefully move things through the Senate.

Reuel Sample: And we need to send Dave Rouzer back to the House. Let's talk about the state races and one that actually surprises a lot of people this year is the the Supreme Court. They have played an important role in overturning some laws that were passed by the legislature. And we need to get we need to get these folks on the Supreme Court that are going to uphold the laws here in North Carolina. Tell me about those guys.

Will Knecht: Yeah, Judge Richard Dietz and Trey Allen, two conservatives who are running for Supreme Court. You hit the nail on the head rule. These races are so critical. We've seen activist judges. We elected three Republicans in 2020 to the state Supreme Court, but that left us still in the minority four, three, four Democrats, only three Republicans. So what we still have is a Supreme Court that is legislating from the bench. They have usurped the role of the state legislature and we need to return the North Carolina constitutional separation of the branches of government to what they rightly are established as. And in Trey Alan and a judge, Richard Dietz. You don't have two men that are that are conservatives and political by nature. They're constitutionalists. And they will look at issues that come before the Supreme Court and taking partisan politics out of it, taking a mindset to legislate from the bench out of it. And they will look at how it stands against the North Carolina Constitution and they will rule in favor of the Constitution each and every time. And that's what we need in a Supreme Court. Those two races are absolutely critical. One is an open seat and one is a contested seat with a sitting appointed Supreme Court judge. And so we need to we need to elect Trey Allen and Richard Dietz to the Supreme Court. So we can't forget that race. Judicial races are partisan. So you'll see the Republican next to Mr. Allen and

Mr. Dietz's name. And we need to make sure that we fill that oval in for those two good jurists.

Reuel Sample: And that that area is way far down on the ballot. So don't skip that area at the state race, state level. We also have a Senate seat, Mike Lee running, and he is getting hammered from the left. And a good family man that has done a lot for New Hanover and a lot for North Carolina.

Will Knecht: He absolutely is one of the most respected members of the North Carolina state Senate. He has delivered for New Hanover County. State Senator Michael Lee is cutting taxes and yet keeping fiscal responsibility at the state level. You know, the state of North Carolina walked through the pandemic better than almost any state in the country financially. Why? Because beginning in the early 2010s, Republicans who had control of the legislature were fiscally disciplined. They were reducing our taxes while at the same time cutting unnecessary spending and putting a rainy day fund of billions of dollars which sustained us through the pandemic. Senator Michael Lee was a leader in that fiscal responsibility. And again, the the ads that are being thrown against him are just pushing the limit as to flat out being lies. But you see, Michael, as Senator Lee at the polls and you see a man who is above the fray, who is out meeting with voters in his humble public servant leadership perspective. He's holding the Lee sign out there and asking for votes. He's engaging with voters, both who are looking at his candidacy and his opponent. He's not afraid to discuss issues very calmly. Senator Lee is a critical race. There is probably this would be a truthful statement that a road to the supermajority in the North Carolina Senate runs through. Michael Lee. If he's elected, the Republican Party has a good perspective, a good chance of winning a supermajority in the North Carolina Senate.

Will Knecht: Why is that important? In the history of North Carolina, a governor has vetoed bills roughly 130 times. Roy Cooper in six years has vetoed over 70.

Reuel Sample: That's over half of all those in history.

Will Knecht: In six years in the history of North Carolina. And one of those bills been that Roy Cooper has vetoed. They've been bills that have teacher pay raises in them. They have been bills that have parental choice for education in them. These common

sense bills that he vetoes, once we have a supermajority, we can override any of his vetoes and get common sense legislation that works for all families in North Carolina passed. That's why Michael Lee's race is so important as we talk earlier. We talked about campaigns and elections. It might come down to just a few votes. Michael Lee's race will come down to just a few votes. He lost in 18 by about 200 votes. He won in 2020 by about 1000 votes. His race will come down to a very tight margin of victory. Conservatives get out there and vote for Senator Michael Lee.

Reuel Sample: Let's take a look at some of the other races. Ted Davis and in a newly redistricted, newly redrawn district. And then John Hinnant going up against Deb Butler. And that's a that's going to be a nail biter as well.

Will Knecht: To, again, critical race as we talk about the supermajority in the state Senate. Let's talk about the supermajority in the state House, because, again, we need both houses of the legislature to have a supermajority to override these crazy vetoes of Governor Cooper. Ted Davis and John Hinnant are the tip of the spear in the house as well. It's pretty crazy to think how important New Hanover County is. Ted Davis has been a public servant as a county commissioner, as a state legislature for over 25 years. You know, he's an attorney by profession and attorney only makes money when he has billable hours. Ted Davis has sacrificed so many billable hours to serve you and me as residents of New Hanover County. He was thrown a wrench in his district with all of the redistricting shenanigans that went on because of the state Supreme Court. And he has a very difficult district that he is running in because he lost a number of precincts that were some of his most solid Republican districts. So he has a he has probably the toughest race of his life. Again, a race that could come down to hundreds of votes. So, Ted Davis, again, if Ted Davis loses, I don't believe there's any chance that we in North Carolina have a chance to get the supermajority in North Carolina again.

Reuel Sample: And talk about extremism. He is actually up against a candidate who is very extreme on the left.

Will Knecht: You know, she went out to probably a nice woman, but she went out, lived in California, and I think her mentor became Nancy Pelosi because she came back to her hometown of Wilmington, North Carolina, with such extremist views that are out of touch with the residents of of of New Hanover County, that it's it's it's head shaking.

Reuel Sample: So good public service announcement from the GOP. Parents, don't let your babies grow up to be Californians. And then you've got John Hinnant running downtown. John has done so much for Wilmington and and is a great candidate, been out doorknocking and he's he's in a good fight down there.

Will Knecht: It's shocking. This is one that the entire state is watching. His opponent is the most liberal progressive member of the state house. She is an ineffective House member. Many of her Democrat counterparts in the state House don't even like working with her. And they'll call a Charlie Miller or a Ted Davis who who are in the legislature to help get things done, not her. She has not passed any bills that would help you and I as citizens of New Hanover County. She is a progressive. And if you look at her platform, which she won't talk about because it doesn't align with the majority of the views of New Hanover County residents, She is such a leftist. John Hinnant is a small business owner. He has been the president of Wilmington, Downtown Inc for years in that important transition to bear the fruit of one of the most amazing small town downtowns in the entire state. John Hinnant was the guy who helped lead that effort to transition our downtown to the amazing place it is today. So he's a community leader. He served on a number of boards and he is the hardest working candidate I've ever seen.

Will Knecht: He's doorknocking every day. He's making phone calls. He is doing. He's at the polls all the time. He is doing whatever it takes. Again, he answered the call to public service because during the pandemic, he and his wife looked at each other and said, one of us has to do something, because what's happening in our government right now out of Raleigh is just ridiculous. And John, again, at great cost to himself, stepping away from his business. He has campaigned like crazy and will be an incredible representative in the state house for all residents of New Hanover County and North Carolina. So, John Hinnant, if he wins. And I believe he will very tight margin. But I believe John Hinnant will, that will almost guarantee that the Republicans will get a super majority. So you look at Ted Davis, if he loses. Very hard for us to get a super majority. You look at John Bennett, if he wins, it is almost a certainty that we get a super majority. So our state legislative candidates in Ted Davis, John Hinnant, Michael Lee are absolutely critical to restoring sanity in Raleigh.

Reuel Sample: But Republicans have to get out and vote. They have to get out and vote. And let's let's talk about local because all politics is local. We've got some big races just like everybody else on the country school boards are huge. And we've got four candidates that are running and they're out there every day. Let's talk about the importance of the school board race.

Will Knecht: You know, the importance of the school board race has just been magnified over the last two years. It is absolutely amazing the difference. And we've seen parents and grandparents rise up again, regardless of party and say this is crazy. We are not educating our children sufficiently. My kids are not prepared in English, in reading, in writing, in math, in civics. They're not prepared to go the college route. They're not prepared to go to trade school and become a tradesmen or trades woman. And parents are fed up. It's great in 2020, I couldn't recruit candidates to run for school board. Nobody would run. I talked to 15 different people. Please run. Nobody would. This year, school board is the most talked about race in our county and maybe even across the country. We have four amazing conservatives who are running to again, not for power, not for control, but they want parents and grandparents to be back in the driver's seat to make the decisions for their children. They want kids to be educated. They want kids to have equal opportunity to be the best they can be. They want our schools to be safe. And this is what our candidates are running on. And we have four amazing candidates. Pete Wildeboer, who is a sitting school board member. We need Pete back on the school board. We have Pat Bradford, who has been a small business owner and a fighter for children for 15 years as a child advocate in our schools and in our social services. We have two young moms in Melissa Mason and Josie Barnhardt, who are just fighting for the moms. All four of our our kids are fighting for parents and grandparents. All four of our candidates. Wildeboer Bradford, Barnhart, Mason are fighting for kids to give them the best opportunity. When they graduate from New Hanover County schools. They come out with every opportunity before them to be the best they're created by God to be.

Reuel Sample: We talk about majorities at the state level. We need Republicans to vote Republican across the school board slate because if we don't get all four elected, then the Democrats still have a majority and we won't be able to get much done.

Will Knecht: That's true. That's I mean, it's a sad case that, again, we're seeing such polarization and dysfunction. I mean, let's let's be frank. Our school board is is is dysfunctional at this point. And it's not presenting a great light on New Hanover County, to put it mildly. We do need to elect all four conservatives Bradford, Barnhart, Wildeboer and Mason. We have to elect all four. So again, for those of you who haven't voted, please fill in all four of those ovals. We need four four good, solid Republicans on that school board.

Reuel Sample: The last two races we've got Tom Toby and LeAnne Pierce for County Commission and Tom Rhoades for sheriff. All those.

Will Knecht: People. Matt? Matt Yeah, absolutely.

Reuel Sample: Matt Yes. All those all those folks are on the ballot stepping up to serve the public for the four in elected positions.

Will Knecht: It's fantastic to talk about. Let's let's look at the county commission race and Tom Toby, a man of the people. You know, Tom spent much of his career as a firefighter in the city. So he knows public service. And I love his stump speech where he brings his beaten and worn and beaten up fire helmet to as he ran into fires to protect and to save. That's what he will do for New Hanover County citizens. Tom's a man of the people, not a wealthy guy, not a well connected guy, a guy who, again, through the pandemic said that what's happening with these mandates that are impacting our kids in schools and impacting our county and small business people. He just raised his hand and said, I'm willing, I'll run, I'll fight. And he fights for you and me as a as he'll fight for you and me as a county commissioner. He doesn't have huge money behind him, but he has the people behind him.

LeAnne Pierce, a great public servant down in Carolina Beach, brings established leadership, great connections, both in New Hanover County with other governing boards, City council. She knows and has worked with many of our sitting county commissioners. She knows every one of our state legislative delegation as well, and is ready in day one to be effective and work. She brings a also a very unique and I think this is important. One of the great things about New Hanover County are beaches, right? Our tourism industry.

Will Knecht: Yeah. LeAnn owns a hotel in Carolina Beach and she was the mayor and a member of the town council in Carolina Beach. So she brings a needed, necessary voice from the beach communities. But she has that overall perspective of leadership. So I can't wait to see Tom Tobey and LeAnn Pierce, sworn in as our next county commissioners, giving us a majority on the county commission, which will be a prudent fiscal decision on behalf of all residents.

Will Knecht: I mean, you remember in the middle of the pandemic what happened with our county commission. The current Democrat controlled county commission, what they do, they voted to increase their pay, maybe the highest pay increase of a governor of a government board in the entire country during the pandemic, when you and I were when small businesses were shut down, our sitting county commission voted a pay increase for themselves while at the same time putting on you and me as taxpayers a tax increase. Let's reverse that. Let's elect conservatives. Let's let's elect people who believe in people, not government. You know, Republicans at our fundamental base believe that people know best about their own lives, that we can make the best decisions about what is best for our families and for our kids. And you see that across the board in our candidates and including LeAnn Pierce and Tom Tobey for county commission.

Reuel Sample: But also out rounding that out with public safety, as is Matt Rhoades for Sheriff.

Will Knecht: Absolutely. A guy who is standing strong, who has been a firearms instructor for years, has trained many of our public servants in how to properly use a handgun. And Matt is really concerned and focused on school safety and wants to make changes in how our our schools are patrolled and kept safe by the public safety officers that that are in our schools. He's a man of the people who be on the streets with his his officers and his deputies. And and you and I will see him on the forefront of of the crime fight. And again, to reduce and and return the streets to to safety. Matt is a guy who looks like a sheriff. If you've ever met Matt, he just looks like the guy who needs to be our sheriff. So school safety is absolutely critical to Matt Rhoades. And we need Matt Rhoades as our sheriff.

Reuel Sample: Across the board. We've got a huge number of things to do here in the 2022 elections, and we need folks to turn out and to support our Republicans. If you have any questions, they can always go to the New Hanover County GOP website or to any of our candidates websites. Well, as we close up, what are some of your final thoughts for people as they go into Tuesday?

Will Knecht: Vote. Vote. Vote. You know, that's really my final thought. If you haven't voted, we need you to vote. Many of these elections and many of these issues that you and I hold dear, too, are on the ballot. And as Reuel just mentioned, if we don't elect Republicans from the top of the ballot down ballot, we will not return the power to the people, we the people. And that's what all of our candidates are fighting for. We have sample ballots that you can print out at NewHanoverGOP.org. Just go to our home page, click on Main Image, and you can get a sample ballot and see. We have circled in red and the the ovals filled with our great candidates. And we want to make it as that. You can find all of your voting locations as well. But the final word, if you haven't voted, please vote. And if you have voted, tell every friend you know that this election is the most important in their lifetime, that they have great candidates on the ballot on the Republican side that they will be proud of and who welcome accountability. That's another important thing. Our candidates once elected, they want to be held accountable. They want to be transparent. They want to be open. And so vote and vote Republican top to bottom. That's the message.

Reuel Sample: Will Knecht, the Chairman of the New Hanover County Republican Party. So good to have you here. Thank you, sir.

Will Knecht: Thank you. Appreciate it.