



The NHC GOP Podcast

Episode 19: Executive Experience: LeAnn Pierce for New Hanover County Commissioner

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Reuel Sample: Bringing a wealth of knowledge to the County Commission. Welcome to the NHC GOP podcast. I'm Reuel Sample. Happy to be joined by LeAnn Pierce. Good morning, LeAnn. Thanks for joining us.

LeAnn Pierce: Good morning. Thanks for having me.

Reuel Sample: We're going to get right into some important questions for you. How can you, as a county commissioner, in the midst of all this focus on the economic downturn of this country, how can you do it better here in New Hanover County? So at least it's not exacerbated by what you're doing here in New Hanover.

LeAnn Pierce: Right. So a lot of what's going on in our country right now is happening from the national level, from the feds, from the federal government. So and it does

trickle down, certainly to us. And I think that one of the things that we have to do is keep our taxes down. That's one thing we can do and cut any wasteful spending that's going on in our government. You know, as you know, I'm a small business owner and I think we need to run our our government like a small business. And we don't have that luxury in in business to just spend any time we want to. We have to cut those expenses. And I'm really good at that. So I think I'll bring that to the commission. And I do think that we also need to support the private sector, support our other businesses and let them bring better paying jobs for our citizens so they have more money. This is just a very uncertain time in our in our society. And we need leaders who can navigate us through that time.

Reuel Sample: People understand that you have to pay taxes. If we're going to have a government, we're going to have to pay taxes. But I think what people get really ticked off about is when those hard work, hard earned money used for taxes is spent wastefully. And that's a pet peeve of yours, isn't it?

LeAnn Pierce: It is absolutely a pet peeve of mine. It was to make this joke at council. You know, when we went, we went into the council room. They had the big expensive paper clips and and those things were like, Oh my gosh, you're not. And I'm counting how much each of those costs and raking them up and taking them with me, you know, and all the extra copies and the full color print that we get with 100 pages of it, those are a lot of those things are wasteful spending. And that's just a simple, simple example. But I absolutely see it. It's it's I have a keen eye to that.

Reuel Sample: And unlike unlike small businesses, you're a small business. I'm a small business where we have to go out and and if we're if we're going to make a profit, feed our families, we've got to watch our costs. We can't go out and just demand from people. Give us money for our businesses like the government does. And so you're going to be very careful that every dollar that we spend, you're very careful.

LeAnn Pierce: And you absolutely have to you absolutely have to pick your battles. You're not going to win every one of them. So I think you have to find an area that you really believe that you can say you're not going to win all of them, but you have to find those areas where you think you can cut the spending and instruct your staff to do that.

Reuel Sample: I really don't want to be on the wrong side of picking a battle with you. Another big concern across the country and here in New Hanover County is crime both in our schools and in our streets. New Hanover County is not free from it. How are you as a county commissioner, planning to make our schools and our communities safe?

LeAnn Pierce: So unfortunately, we've seen a lot of violence in our country, a lot of a lot of gun violence. It's just it's crazy. You know, every day you look at the news and there's more violence. So, number one, we have to fund our police department and listen to them and hear their needs and get them what they need and empower them to enforce the laws number one. I do think that Port City United now that it's in place, we need to move forward and try to make that work. But honestly, I think we need to have more SROs in the school system. I think there's one and a half per school. We need more than that. We need SROs in our schools. I think we need to listen to what our students have told us makes them safe. The safety of our children is the number one concern that we have, and none of us have said this many times. None of us want to send our children or grandchildren off to school and wonder if there's going to be a shooting that day. And that's just nerve wracking all day, you know, for for parents. And I don't I don't want that in New Hanover County. And I know that the students took a survey and it's very interesting. Some of the items that were simple items that they needed to feel safe. They were things like having more adults that they trusted in the school system, more after school activities, crazy things like clean bathrooms and bathrooms they felt safe in. And there was all. So the school bus issue. Having the school bus arrive on time and pick them up on time. So those things that the kids ask for and I don't think any of those things are unreasonable. I absolutely support the afterschool programs. Studies have shown that from the time the children get out of school and they get home in the evenings and that gap where their parents are, it's the time they get in trouble. So anything we can do to support that, I'm a huge proponent of.

Reuel Sample: That's interesting that that input came from the students themselves.

LeAnn Pierce: Yeah. And it is online. I read through that and we didn't do all those things so that I would encourage those. Not all children are athletes, so they have to have other activities, whether they be arts or music or, you know, just other things that they can get involved with and anything that we can do to keep them off the streets and out of gangs.

Reuel Sample: It's interesting you talk about SROs, school resource officers or safety resource officers. Is that on the left they want to pull them out of the schools. And and you're saying that an essential part of our school safety is to increase their presence in schools.

LeAnn Pierce: Well, it's twofold. It's one for safety. And when I was when I was on council, Caroline Beach, when I was mayor, we did not have a dedicated SRO. So our police department, we funded our police department to have our own SRO full time because it does two things. It does increase safety and it teaches the children to trust the police and not to see them as an enemy. So we had them absolutely at our elementary school and they were some of the most loved adults in that room. And unfortunately, we lost that one to New Hanover County, which I'm excited to see some of my officers again are in New Hanover County now. But we do have a resource officer. I think they rotate, but we need dedicated officers and we need to make that important and we need our children to trust those officers and be able to go to them and say, Hey, I need to talk to you.

Reuel Sample: That connection with law enforcement starting very, very early is extraordinarily important. As people move into our location another issue that people are talking about is infrastructure. It's being strained is that we've got traffic is is, is is bad. We've got all this infrastructure needs, grids and everything else. How can the county commission address those concerns?

LeAnn Pierce: Well, I do believe that infrastructure is the number one thing that our county commissioners should be focused on when it comes to growth. If we don't have the infrastructure to support a project, we can't approve a project, particularly like in the northern part of the county. Before we allow development there, we need to make sure that the roads are in place and the water and the infrastructure that goes along with that is in place. We have in the past approved projects before there was infrastructure to support it. Now that does mean that we have to work with our state partners with NCDOT and make sure they're on target to control the traffic in New Hanover County.

Reuel Sample: You're not against development?

LeAnn Pierce: No, absolutely not. I believe. I believe if you don't grow, you die and we're going to grow. Every thriving community grows. But we need to grow in ways that are balanced. So I call that smart growth that we have, the infrastructure, that we have the traffic, and that we do have some conservation of trees and we do have some open space coupled with that. And, you know, some of the hard questions that people are going to have to look at or do we want to go up or out with our growth. And we can go up some in New Hanover County. Those are some things we'll have to look at. But if we want to add housing that we have to look at how we're going to do that.

Reuel Sample: You are out on the campaign trail all the time. All the time. I see you out there. What are people talking to you about? What are you hearing in terms of this election and the things that they want you to do?

LeAnn Pierce: You know, it's interesting. So growth and development is, number one. Inflation is certainly on their minds. And, you know, I think a lot of our citizens have lost trust with our county commissioners for some of the issues that have gone on. I think they have lost a lot of trust with elected officials in general. And I think that's something that we really need to build on and regain that trust and transparency with our public.

Reuel Sample: Interesting. If people hear nothing else during this podcast, if they hear nothing else during - you've been campaigning now, this has been a long campaign season. If they hear nothing else from you, what do you want people to hear so that they will know that you're the best candidate for this position?

LeAnn Pierce: What I want people to hear is that I have experience. This is not my first day on the job. I've been elected for eight years and I think I'm bringing to the table a lot of experience, a lot of networking, a lot of learned experiences that I can use on the county level. I've been a mayor in New Hanover County. I've made those relationships, those networks, and I've learned the number one thing is to build consensus. You have to have consensus building amongst your other mayors, your county commissioners, your state and federal partners, our school board. We definitely got to have some great relationships with school board members so that we can work through the issues and the school system because ultimately they do make the decisions for our school, but we can certainly influence them with conversations and meeting with them and having a great relationship. And I bring that to the table. I tell you

again, being a small business owner, I'm going to watch the purse strings with a close eye. And having done that, I'm used to balancing budgets in a municipality. So I understand how to do that. And I know and we've always had that in my town. I know that New Hanover County is much larger, but I certainly know where to start at and know who to go to for some answers.

Reuel Sample: That executive experience and that relationship experience is absolutely essential to getting things done.

LeAnn Pierce: Absolutely. I say that all the time. If you don't have elected officials that other elected officials want to work with, they're not going to do it. They're not going to say, hey, let's meet up, let's let's have lunch, let's chat, pick up the phone, call you back. You just got to be able to reach out and know who to reach out to. That's important, too. I've always said I don't have all the answers. I know I don't have the answers, but I know people who do have the answers. So that's kind of how I like to build my network.

Reuel Sample: LeAnn, How can people get in touch with you? How can they find out more about you and your campaign and the things that you want to get done?

LeAnn Pierce: So I have a website. It's LeAnnPierce.com and that is spelled l-e-a-n-n p-i-e-r-c-e. My email is on there. Send me an email. My phone number 9105205921. Great text and I'll get back to a phone call. These last couple of weeks have been incredibly busy. I'm going to be at the polls starting tomorrow morning. I'm going to rotate the early voting polls every day and I'll be there on Election Day.

Reuel Sample: October 20th is early voting. That starts tomorrow. You'll see LeAnn out there in her signature red dresses and red outfits, and she'll be out there working all the polls. Leann, I know it's a busy time for you. Thanks for taking the time to join us.

LeAnn Pierce: Absolutely. And I appreciate you doing this. Thank you so much.