



The NHC GOP Podcast

Episode 2:8 **Registering Voters In New Hanover County**

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Reuel Sample: Joining us today is our very special guest Stephanie Fortunato, the second vice chair of the New Hanover County Republican Party. Stephanie, welcome to the podcast.

Stephanie Fortunato: Thank you so much.

Reuel Sample: We are launching here in New Hanover County a voter registration drive. Can you tell me a little bit about why Republicans are focusing on registering new voters?

Stephanie Fortunato: Yes, sir. One of our greatest criticisms that is out there in the media by our Democrat opponents is that we are looking to disenfranchise voters. And that essentially means it's just a big fancy word to say to take their opportunity to have a voice in how they are governed away from them. And one of the most important reasons why I originally got involved in the madness of politics was because I wanted to effectively have my voice be heard. And so I would like to make sure that each and every person out there who wants to have their voice heard has that opportunity. And I

have a team of people who feel the same way, because the best way for us to all live well together is, is to develop a conversation and understand that we're actually have more in common than you would think.

Reuel Sample: What do you mean by that? Is that is that right now we seem to live in a country that's deeply divided between Democrat and Republican. And what you're saying is that there's more in common between the two parties, or at least between Americans then than we're led to believe.

Stephanie Fortunato: Absolutely. The first and foremost thought I have is my visits to speak at the Board of Education meetings. And I've been doing this now for two years. And one of the things that I, I did when I was just recently there last week was I thanked each and every board member because if they are seeking to create a learning environment focused on academic excellence, which all statistics show is the great equalizer for students to transform them from whatever lifestyle they were born into to whatever lifestyle they'd like to live. Well, you know, that's something we can all take pride in, whether, you know, every student, every parent, every educator. And right now, I find the most disturbing thing about our adversary, the Democrat Party, is they're they're just constantly breaking down and compartmentalizing and labeling. But the folks out there, you know, so whether even if you're the taxpayer, I mean, you want a good return on your investment. And so and a local excellent school system is always one of those things. When I knock on doors or I speak to people at the polls, they're concerned about whether it's their children or their neighbor's children. Not only that, they're concerned about violence in schools and in like local parks. So safety is always an issue, not having to choose between food and fuel.

Stephanie Fortunato: The price of eggs and bacon has gone up astronomically. And, you know, the a tank of fuel. I mean, if you want to go visit somewhere with your family for a long extended holiday weekend, you know, it's going to really affect your choices. And then, of course, you know, most importantly, I would say that when we're when we're living in communities, we we, for instance, you know, there's certain things that I don't need an HOA to tell me, you know, I take care of my home, not only for myself and and, you know, because it's a basic, you know, investment, but because I want to be a good neighbor. And even if I were living in a condominium or an apartment complex, you know, that would mean that I would not want to do to others what I don't want done

to myself. I think the golden rule is something that still applies when when push comes to shove and a day to day life. And one of my heroes and role models has taught me that we can always have civil discussions. And so I feel that being able to vote is part of a civil discussion with in our local, state and national political scene.

Reuel Sample: In order to do that, though, you have to be registered to vote. You have to be on the rolls to vote. And so how are you going to go about getting people on those rolls? What is the Republican Party going to start doing?

Stephanie Fortunato: Okay. Well, my job as the get out the vote chair essentially is to help the other volunteers within all the different precincts facilitate folks who may be living in their precincts the opportunity to vote. So I have an incredible staff that support me in data and communications, plus my precinct teams and. Excuse me. Huge shout out to my district chairs. These are the people who care so deeply. They give hundreds of volunteer hours with their expertise just to make sure that that when I, you know, come up with a concept, we can actually take it from concept to application. So upcoming on the 24th here in New Hanover County, there is a gentleman named Scott Pressler, and he travels the nation and he speaks on social media and he is very motivational, but he helps empower people to go out and empower people. What do I mean by that? Well, essentially, whether it's a digital form or it's a actual physical form, find people who need to know their opportunity to vote is right there and it's possible and just facilitate that. So I have the ability right now and have developed a program with my my data specialist. He has kind of give him I talk in my layman's terminology like, okay, there's folks out there I know who just may be sitting home saying, I really want to have a voice, but I'm not sure how to go about doing that. And so we find through the Board of Elections their information or through other means of unregistered voters, and then we find out what precinct they live in and we knock on their door and we say hi. We offer them the opportunity to either take a physical document from us they can fill out and return to the local board of elections or a digital format, which is also something that on an ongoing basis, people can always visit our website and get that information because I truly believe that information is power.

Reuel Sample: That website that you talked about is New Hanover County gop.org. And we'll have all this information up on the website so that you can just go there, click on it and that will take you right over to the state of North Carolina registration system.

We don't collect your data at all, do we? That all goes up to the state so that you can be registered in time for the next election and the next election is coming up. It is the municipality elections for Wilmington, right?

Stephanie Fortunato: Absolutely. And if anyone wants to communicate with me personally, I'm vice2chair2@NewHanovergop.org. But yes, I think the municipal which is the very first elections that I participated in as a precinct chair when I joined two years ago of my precinct, which is for the municipals, it's it's the election that touches us on the most intimate basis because it is it is local. And I have to say that I used to think it was a mystery, like, oh, it's a great mystery. Oh, you know, knowing your local politician, oh, the mayor, oh, this and that. But it really isn't because these folks mean honestly, anyone worth their weight in salt who has gotten into office as a city councilman or county commissioner. Um, you know, these local people, they want to know your issues, whether it's Catherine Bruner, John Lennon, Neil Anderson, these folks, they want to know what matters to you and they like to hear from an email. My friend Pat Bradford at the Board of Education all the time says, We want to hear from you. We need you to be at our meetings. We need you to support us, and we need your help to liaison with your neighbors. So even if your neighbors can't come and and help us to understand what's important to them, we need you either A, to facilitate that conversation by, you know, giving them our email or B, you know, taking that information from your local neighborhood, you know, to your local school board or city council or county commissioner.

Reuel Sample: Now you're going to be going out and talking to people, door knocking and asking them to register either through a document or through online. They don't have to register as Republican or Democrat or unaffiliated. We're just asking people to register. But you are going to talk to them about the values of the Republican Party.

Stephanie Fortunato: Absolutely. And again, this is just the continuing conversation that, oh, especially, I would say, during early voting and on Election Day, when people come up to me and we just have a chat. They find out, wow, you know, you're just like me. You're you're a mom. You know, you're a wife. You're a sister. Your. Your, um, a daughter. Your. You're my next door neighbor. You're involved because you care. And that begins to open up that opportunity to say, okay, well, yes, you know, it's just as important to me to allow somebody else to have their voice be heard, because if I'm you

know, it would be disingenuous for me to want to suppress someone else's voice. And it would also be foolish of me not to want to hear the concerns of my fellow individual and my neighbor, who is a very interesting mixture. I live in a neighborhood that is kind of fair and balanced and very much almost the bellwether precinct of a bellwether county for the United States. And a lot of people think, you know, that's some big, fancy political term, but essentially it just means it's a pretty fair representation of what the voter makeup is, which gives us an idea of what do the voters count as important enough to come out on Election Day and speak their voice? So bottom line is there's a lot of folks out there who who might be like me, who used to sit home on social media. We call ourselves, you know, keyboard warriors and repost and go into chat groups. But, you know, until we actually get out there and we represent weather ourselves or our neighbors and encourage them by getting their vote in.

Stephanie Fortunato: You know, a lot of people would also say have a lot of friends who are sitting out there saying, but, Stephanie, you know, we can't always count on election integrity. And I would say, well, you know, that that is definitely an issue I would like to speak to you about again, ViceChair2@NewHanoverCountygop.org. Because whether it's our local GOP and it's above and beyond the call of duty, incredible work they've done these past couple of years. And really to make sure I was I participated in a vote. What I would call audit just recently last week where we were allowed to go in and sit there and observe and see the envelopes by which people's absentee ballots came in and go through a checklist to make sure that everything was legit. So we had so many people doing that. We had people who participated as poll observers and poll judges in your local voting locations. We have people on the team who communicate with the legal minds up in Raleigh and just make sure that the Board of Elections is giving us all a fair shake so that our our votes matter. And if that is something that is really, really important to you, again, contact me at vicechair2@NewHanoverCountygop.org and I will put you in touch with the team of people who are making that difference. And if you don't believe me, I hope they can persuade you.

Reuel Sample: We're going to talk more about election integrity here in just a second. Just a reminder that today's podcast is sponsored by Cape Fear Boat Brokerage. We're living here in some of the best waters on the East Coast, and it's a great place to have a boat. And so whether you're in the market to buy a boat or to sell your own vessel, give.

Cape Fear Boat brokerage A call at (910) 242-9174. We are talking to Stephanie Fortunato, the second vice chair of the New Hanover County. And we're talking about a registration drive. But one of the things that keep people away from the polls, especially over the last couple years, is in is election integrity. Is that. Stephanie, you've heard it over and over and over again. Well, why should I vote? Because my vote is not going to be counted or my vote doesn't count or they're going to screw up the elections one way or another. What is the what what is the Republican Party in the state and here in New Hanover County? What are we doing to ensure election integrity?

Stephanie Fortunato: Well, first of all, we were just away this weekend at the state convention, 1800 delegates representing 100 counties, 39 of your fellow, you know, Republicans here in New Hanover County turned out to represent you and make sure that your voice was heard at the conference in Greensboro. And we reelected Chairman Whatley, who is a champion not only for us on our local level, but that is being recognized now at the national level. And let me explain what that means to everyone. This is why Chairman Whatley got my husband and my vote. By the way, my husband was interviewed, Frank Fortunato on the way out. Sorry, have to do a shameless plug there by WRAL. And he he expressed this similar reason why we support the chairman and he made available to every single county the ability to have a legal consultation through throughout whatever process it is regarding election integrity. And a lot of folks very often, you know, they're not tuning into my buddy Nick Craig's morning show like I am every morning and calling in and texting and hearing all the things. And Nick is really fair and balanced because he does not only national, but he talks about what affects us day to day, local and state.

Stephanie Fortunato: But most people get their their information from mainstream media. And so they're only seeing the national and a lot of times they become demoralized and discouraged. And first of all, I just want to say turn off. Turn it off. Listen to Nick. Um, but secondly, what I would say is that because Chairman Whatley has so successfully done this and because even though there wasn't a red wave nationally in 2022, both Florida and North Carolina, we held the line and we had a red wave mean. We elected every single judge. We set out to elect another initiative by Chairman Whatley. So tremendous because it's now turned back the the ruling to we will have voter ID in the fall. Huge, huge, huge win for election integrity, at least we know. And that includes absentee ballots and absentee ballots. You know, my buddy

Ted Davis, up working hard, tirelessly at the the NC House from District 20. He and his suitemate are working tirelessly on these issues. And so when a vote comes in absentee ballot, it is going to have to be in by 7:30 the night. Wait for it. Wait for it. Yes. Imagine that Election day.

Reuel Sample: Of Election Day. So we're not sitting around waiting for ballots to come in because that's a change. You it had been that it had to be postmarked on the day of the election, which could delay the the the ballot to come in for up to a week to two weeks. But now it has to be received by 7:30 p.m. on the day of the election at your local board of elections.

Stephanie Fortunato: Yes. Yes. And so and a lot of people scratch their heads like, how could that be possible? You know, going back to my undergraduate degree and studying business law, you know, when you're when you have a postmark by such and such a date, you know, that is legal. Well, no, no longer with that. And then I have to say, for a lot of folks, a lot of folks say, well, why don't we just have a national holiday? Why don't we just have Election Day again? Trust me, folks. The people we returned to office, we worked really, really hard. We had a red wave. We we were one of 17 counties in all of the United States to flip our school board way. Okay, Just think about that.

Reuel Sample: And I'm going to jump in on that, is that we flipped our school board with a county that a lot of people would think leans left. We're we're we're purple. We're not deep purple, but we're purple. And we sent for conservative Republicans to the school board and completely flipped it. That's that is an amazing accomplishment.

Stephanie Fortunato: It is. And this takes me to the point where, you know, a lot of folks, again, the conversation a lot of folks will find that we are very similar, especially if I'm knocking on doors of unaffiliates. We are very similar. We want to preserve the America we grew up in for our children and our children's children and our neighbor's children. And that means we don't want them being burdened by, first of all, having debt that is in the trillions of dollars which, you know, these children going forth are going to be burdened with. We we don't want them to be burdened with those things. We we want them to get an education that is actually an education and not an indoctrination. We want them to do it in a safe environment. We want them we want everyone to be

able to be on the streets and be safe, whether they're in their vehicles or they're at a park. I mean, I love stopping by Empty Park on a Saturday because it is such a hub of the community and you see everyone coming and going, Well, we want that to remain a safe place. Or if you're over by the courts in Pine Valley Park. So there's there's so many different places that need safety. We want you not to be overburdened by taxes.

Stephanie Fortunato: My friend Dane Scalise, who has stepped into our beloved Deb Hays role as county commissioner, has taken up her mantle. And he is a father of two young children with a beautiful young wife. And he feels it personally. And he's also he lives in the downtown area. So he's a member. He hears what the different people are saying and he understands, just like my friend Ted understands, just like Mike Lee understands, just like, you know, if you want to go nationally, David Rouzer understands or Ted Budd, that when they get into office that that their there are grandparents and parents and teenagers who might soon to be voters. There's a whole bunch of people who just want to have a basic their basic living like their day to day life. They want to enjoy it and they want to be able to trust the people that they put in place to monitor policies and laws. And, you know, our judges as well. And they, like a lot of people, think, well. I don't have time to go to every single city council meeting or county commissioner meeting or board of Education meeting, Like, do I have to worry, you know, that that things are not going to be good? Well, that's why you need to be registered as a voter. That's why you need to come out and help me register other voters. That's why you need to talk to your friends and your neighbors.

Stephanie Fortunato: You need to get off your keyboard like I did or just, you know, learn how to be mobile. A lot can be, you know, conversated on on your on your Facebook page or your Instagram account and, and just make friends with all those folks out there and find out that there's a really dynamic community. And even though you don't agree on everything, there's a lot of stuff you agree on. And it is so wonderful to live in community where, you know, you can have a picnic and you can agree to disagree. I mean, even Republicans, we don't all agree, but we go by the Ronald Reagan 11th commandment where if we can agree on 80% of topics, you know, we can let the other 20% go. And I would say with unaffiliated and, you know, look at Tricia Cotham, who was just at our county convention. You know, the the Dems have moved so far left that they've left a lot of John F Kennedy Blue Dog Democrats behind, people who just again want to represent their communities and preserve the the way of life

which allows their families to to hopefully that every generation lives a little bit better than the previous generation. And well, you know, statistics right now are showing that that is not the case for for people who will be coming out of school right now.

Reuel Sample: So the initiative is the New Hanover County voter registration drive. It's going to be happening at various times throughout the summer. Stephanie and her crew will be out there knocking on doors and talking to people and encouraging people to vote. Stephanie Fortunato, thank you for joining us today. Looking forward to all the things that you've got going on. Scott Pressley coming out on the 24th of June and others. Thank you for all that you're doing.

Stephanie Fortunato: You're welcome. And please, again, I want to hear from you. Vicechair2@NewHanoverCountygop.org. Let's have a conversation. Let's meet for coffee. Let's let's make the community we want it to be. And I would like to be your ambassador in helping facilitate the empowerment and not disenfranchisement, but the empowerment of your voice in our local community, state and national level.

Reuel Sample: You have been listening to the NHC GOP podcast, I'm Reuel Sample. Thanks for listening.