



## **THE NHC GOP Podcast Transcript**

### **Season 3, Episode 15: Talking Politics: Conversation with Harry Knight**

**Reuel Sample:** Welcome to the NHC GOP podcast. I'm Reuel Sample. You know, I'm talking to Harry Knight, who is the Executive Director of the New Hanover County Republican Party. Harry worked with the Navy. And I got to tell you, Harry, in the Navy, one of the least admirable jobs is that of Executive Officer. The Captain gets all the glory. The executive officer is where the rubber meets the road. You are the Executive Director of New Hanover County Republican Party. Why in the world would you want to do something like that? Welcome to the podcast.

**Harry Knight:** Yeah, well, thanks for having me. Um, actually, that's not a hard question. As most people that know me and know me and been around politics for a little while here locally. As you said, I grew up in the corporate world. Part of that was working with the United States Navy about half that time. But when I got the opportunity to retire early about ten years ago, I looked around and went. Boy never paid that much attention to politics before, but this is kind of a situation of where you either choose to get in and play or they're going to play you. So like your normal, average everyday voter, you know, ten years ago I was worried about food on the table, roof over my head, kids in school and all those various activities. And you didn't pay attention to the day to day activities that were associated with that? Well, once you get out and you look around, you go, Holy crap, somebody really does need to go work in these situations. So that's why I'm here.

**Reuel Sample:** Well, we're happy that you're that you are here. You are taking over from the very able, uh, work of of Beth Frye, who is now handling our volunteer program. We're going to get into volunteer work here in a little bit. Let's get right into the

heart of things. We've got some big things coming up right here in New Hanover County. And as you and I are recording this podcast tonight, the Wilmington City Council is getting together and talking about tax increases for the upcoming fiscal year, tax increases with a decrease in the budget. Let's talk about those a little bit. We're looking at a 7% property tax increase. We're looking at a 50 cent increase in parking fees. We're looking at a \$10 increase in uh in motor vehicle tax. What's going on here, Harry?

**Harry Knight:** Well, like you said, you talked about Wilmington. Wilmington is looking at doing about a 7% tax increase. They'll probably approve that tonight. Now, fortunately, we have a representative there, Luke Waddell, that's fighting against that. But based on the membership of that particular board or commission, that's not going to be successful. That 7% tax increase is going to happen. The same thing occurred on Pleasure Island, Kure Beach and Carolina Beach ones at 9%, and I think the other ones at 7%, um, due to the makeup of their boards. And then if you look at what happened yesterday with the New Hanover County Board of Commissioners, our Board of Commissioners did an outstanding job. We were able to keep our budget within the current tax rate that we have, provide more money for New Hanover County schools than has ever been provided with a decreasing enrollment. And they did that by cutting out unnecessary and unneeded programs and little cuts here and there to make sure that our tax rate stayed the same. And that's incredibly important to, you know, your normal everyday working citizen, regardless of whatever the administration says, inflation is still high. Wages haven't kept up with that. Now across the county, for the most part, at least, your city portion of your taxes are going to go up. So if you're dealing with higher inflation, increased taxes on one end, the last thing in the world that our citizens need is another tax increase coming from our county associated with that. So thank God, some of our really good leadership that we have will at least minimize that damage. But unfortunately, our citizens are going to see increases because primarily of what we saw in the 2022 elections.

**Reuel Sample:** Now let's talk about those 2022 elections, is that we let's be honest, the Republicans got a drubbing here in, in in Wilmington specifically. What happened. We the Luke Waddell is now the only Republican on that city council. What happened. Why do we have. A scarcity of Republicans sitting on the city council.

**Harry Knight:** Yeah, well, Charlie Rivenbark is actually a Republican. Now, I know Charlie has some history. Yeah. That's right. Uh, you know, as a Democratic Party, but but he got tired of some of their antics and said, this doesn't make any sense anymore. And before the 2022 election, he switched over to the Republican Party. Um. A whole bunch of social issues, Covid and a number of things that people reacted to emotionally is what I think happened not only to Wilmington, but also to Pleasure Island again, Kure Beach and Wrightsville or Kure Beach and Carolina Beach. All the Republicans all got smoked. And so now you have Democrat majority boards on all of those places, and you can see what the impacts of that is. Um, rather than making financially sound decisions based on the economy that you live and the people that are there with you today, you're making decisions more based on emotional factors than you are facts.

**Reuel Sample:** There is an amazing contrast here because if you look at Wilmington and Kure Beach and other places that are controlled by Democrats, is that they're raising taxes. And in this and and oftentimes either decreasing or maintaining, uh, services, while at the same time, places like New Hanover County and even the state of North Carolina, they are decreasing taxes and increasing services, is that North Carolina is going to start paying, giving a \$5,000 bonus to first year teachers and and bringing back master's pay and everything else all without a dime in increased taxes. How were Republicans doing that?

**Harry Knight:** Actually lowering taxes where they're not only just keeping them the same? Yeah, they're the the approved budget. I mean, it's a small decrease, but it's a planned decrease as you go through the next several years. And eventually and that's on the personal tax level, on a business tax level. The plan is I don't remember the exact timing. I think it's out in like the ten year point. We're going to go to a zero business tax status here in North Carolina. And the reason that we do this is just. Pretty financially sound and you can see the results you described them. So when North Carolina becomes a business friendly state, what you see is businesses coming in and what that result. And you don't have that income tax associated with it. They spend that money here. So what do they do? They build factories, they hire employees. Um, they bring more employees here. They expand existing facilities and all of that. What that really does is that increases your tax base, because now all of these employees and these companies are paying an increased basis on property taxes, on sales taxes, on gasoline taxes, because of all the things that they're they're running. And that's a much

better increase and larger increase than the revenue that you're losing due to lowering a personal income tax. So the so the net is a gain to our budget. And that's what we've been seeing in North Carolina since the Republicans took over. I think it was in 2012 when we finally had a majority. So it's been about ten years, a little over ten years. And ever since then you've seen revenue or tax rates either steady or decreasing, revenues going up and spending getting under control. What does that result in that results in a balanced budget and surpluses so that you have money for such things like hurricanes, for example, like one of the things.

**Reuel Sample:** We get those from time to time.

**Harry Knight:** Yeah. So so one of the things for like the budget meeting yesterday for New Hanover County, um, one of the particular commissioners was advocating that we dip into our, our reserve funds from out of the hospital, about \$300 million to pay for this because we have the money. Well, that all sounds well and good, but that money was specifically set aside for emergency use and to stabilize revenues and to stabilize tax rates and other things. So what's the purpose? So this year is supposed to be a really bad year for hurricanes. They always say that time will tell. We'll see. But if we get hit with a major hurricane like we did with Florence, having that money immediately available allows us to restart recovery efforts immediately. Now, in the real world, the feds are going to reimburse us for a lot of those expenses because we carry the various insurances and we're part of those programs, but that money doesn't happen immediately. It could be six months, it could be a year, it could be several years out before you get it. And if you don't have the money to commence restoration of services and getting people's lives back together, get businesses back up and running, you're sitting at a standstill and just stopped, which makes the situation even worse and people can't return to a normal life. We have \$300 million sitting there ready to go that you can use to fund those efforts immediately. Get work started immediately, knowing full well that whether it's six months or two years, that money will be replaced by the federal government. We don't have to sit and wait with our hands out begging for money so that we can go get roads, open schools, open, power, restored hospitals back on lines. We can go do the work now. That's the reason it's important not to dip into those kinds of emergency funds.

**Reuel Sample:** And and while we're waiting for those funds to come through, if we didn't have those funds there, people's lives are hurting. They can't get to their homes. They can't get to the hospital, they can't get power restored. And because of the leadership of Republicans is that we have that surplus in place that we can dip into. And then when the federal government pays us back, it goes back into that reserve that. So it's always nice to be paying. Dave Ramsey always tells us pay. Pay with cash. We're paying with cash. We're not paying with credit.

**Harry Knight:** Yeah. That's right. So when we need emergency contractor services to like for those of us that were here for 2018, we were literally an island for about three days. We had to restore roads, we had to restore water services, we had to restore power. And it takes emergency services and it takes money, whether you like it or not, it takes money to make that happen because some companies physically can't afford to wait to be paid, or they'll have somebody else that's in the same situation that's willing to pay them now, and we can't. Well, where are you going to go to work? If you were if you're that company, right, you're going to go to where they're going to pay you now. So we've set ourselves up nicely, both here at the local level and the state level. There's a similar emergency fund at the state level for just those kinds of emergencies where when we need it, we can do it, and then we can worry about how to reimburse it later because the emergency is over. At that point, it just becomes a managing a bank account issue and not a how do I turn power back on to, you know, somebody's 80 year old grandmother because I don't have the money to do it.

**Reuel Sample:** We have three Republicans running for our for county commission. Dane Scalise, uh, even though and Dane Scalise was, uh, filling an unexpired uh, term due to, to, to a death in the Republican Party, which was tragic, but he has been doing a fantastic job. John Hinnant it is running for county commission and and, uh, Rivenbark is running for county commission. You've got three Republicans running to keep this up. Let's talk about that race. Is that going to be a close race here in New Hanover?

**Harry Knight:** Well, there's a there's a lot of ways that you can try to predict that race and, um. I think Dane, who's new to the county commission, replaced, you know, the invaluable Deb Hayes due to that, due to that tragedy has just done an outstanding job. Dane is kind of the example of what you would like to see all Republicans behave like. He is the adult in the room. And and you've and you've heard this speech from me and,

and most of the Republican candidates and the rest of the New Hanover County GOP is going to get sick of hearing me say that between now and November 4th. Be the adult in the room, because most of your normal voters and your citizens, that's what they want. They want the trains to run on time. They want the roads to be open. They want power coming to their house. They don't. They don't mind paying for it, but they don't want to pay crazy amounts of money for it and then not see the benefit associated with it. So Dane just does an outstanding job of being able to describe those kinds of things in terms that your normal, everyday citizen can understand it. When you talk to Dane, he doesn't sound like a politician. He sounds like just your normal everyday person and says, here's what we're doing and here's why. And it makes sense. Yes. Um, builds on that.

**Reuel Sample:** And he is unafraid.

**Harry Knight:** Yeah, well, yeah. Dane's afraid of nothing. Dane's just a little bit like me. We'll walk into anywhere, anytime and talk to anybody. So he's he's not afraid of anything. And then you got Bill. Bill's a long term name. A lot of history. I mean, born and raised here in New Hanover County. Been on a number of different boards and commissions. Bill is just an extremely knowledgeable person. And then you've got John Hinnant. Same thing. John's new to the county commission. He has run for office in the past. He tried to unseat Deb Butler in an extremely heavily Democrat leaning district in 2022, and did surprisingly well. John is a very

**Reuel Sample:** He did very well

**Harry Knight:** He's very he's very solid. Just kind of like Dane. Dane gets more attention because Dane's in the in the office today. So he's the one that you know, news media and others talk to all the time. But John is every bit as solid as Dane is. So if we can get our three candidates through there and just keep the stability and keep the, you know, the adults in the room concept will be much better off here.

**Reuel Sample:** Part of the budget that, uh, that was passed was, I believe, about \$115 million going to the school board. And we have three folks running for school board. Bascom, Perry and Natasha Tew, uh, school boards across the country. And here in in New Hanover County continued to be a hot topic and, quite frankly, a winning ticket for

Republicans. Uh, talk about those candidates. And why are Republicans winning on the, on, on, on school boards across the country?

**Harry Knight:** Well, the Republicans are winning across the country because it's pretty simple. Um. The Democrat machine probably 30 years ago. It might even be longer than that. Slowly started integrating into the school systems. And, you know, most people like me and like I talked about before, you know, I retired as long as they didn't impact you personally, weren't paying much attention. So they got themselves embedded in a bunch of social issues, and it just kept kind of growing. And then Covid happened, and now all of a sudden you've got remote teaching and a whole bunch of other things that basically rip that curtain back. And folks were getting a look on the inside that they either one couldn't see before or, you know, wasn't curious enough to see before. But because of all the actions surrounding Covid, people started going, what? And then when they started looking, they're like, well, we don't agree with any of this. So then you saw all the turmoil over, over the the Covid stuff. And the perfect example of that is Virginia. Virginia is absolute solid blue when it comes to that kind of thing because of their proximity to Washington, D.C. and the whole schools and what was happening in schools and Covid restrictions, Republicans blew out those school boards. They took over the governorship. And that's the kind of thing that we're seeing here in New Hanover County as well.

**Harry Knight:** Last race 2022, we swept for for for putting Republicans on that board to take control of it so that we could get some of these issues under control associated with it. And I think you'll continue to see that trend as as long as, you know, we have candidates and we have programs that are the adult in the room kind of programs. It makes sense to the normal, everyday common citizen. Right? We ought to be across the country and the state of North Carolina, you're seeing reading proficiency rates go down. You're seeing math proficiency rates go down. And it's because we're spending too much time talking about other subjects that in some cases have no business being in schools. We need to get back to the basics. It used to be called reading, writing and arithmetic. You know, back in the bad old days when I went to school. But if you can't perform on those very basic levels, when you start to get to more higher advanced topics and you don't have a good foundation, you're not going to be very successful. So we need to make sure we're building the foundations of our schools. And if we stay on that topic, we'll be successful because that's what moms and dads want for their

children. And I don't care how you're politically affiliated when it comes to children, they want the best for their children.

**Reuel Sample:** Well, that was demonstrated in 2022. As you said, we swept the school board. We sent four Republicans to the school board. Yet at the same time, Ted Budd, the Republican candidate who is now the senator of North Carolina, lost here in in New Hanover County. And so the school board topics, cross party lines is that whether you're a Republican, Democrat or independent school school and our kids, uh, are extraordinarily important. Uh, let's, let's, let's keep on going up the line. But I'm going to start at the top. Uh, Donald Trump, as we all know, got convicted of 34 outrageous charges. Uh, some folks are calling them Franken Franken charges or Franken crimes because and and, uh, his, his status and his poll numbers are skyrocketing. Uh, what are you seeing here in New Hanover County with the energy with the Donald Trump campaign?

**Harry Knight:** Yeah, we're seeing the same thing and the little bit of time, and I've been in this position. About two two and a half weeks. I haven't really been here, but I've been involved, as you know, behind the scenes in Republican politics for quite a while. You're seeing that kind of energy and, you know, independent of the narrative. Yes. He went to trial. Yes. He got convicted. Yes. There's a whole bunch of charges. But but your normal everyday citizen goes and looks at this and goes, wait a minute. That's a felony. Those are misdemeanors. They're state level charges. What are they doing in a federal court? Right. Because every one of these charges that that they I mean, their federal level charges are in their state court. So I'm not even sure how that's legal. And that's your perfect grounds for appeal. I mean, this thing is going to get appealed and it's going to get shoved past the election, and it's going to be a talking point. I mean, it's just going to be a big mess. But if you can manipulate the system to take somebody that's as visible and has the resources as like Mr. Trump himself or the Trump campaign, and do that to them. Imagine what they can do to the ordinary everyday citizen if they chose to. And that's what a lot of people are seeing is, man, if they can do that to him, what the hell could they do to me? And the answer to that question is not very pretty.

**Reuel Sample:** So here's the question, Harry, is that is that Republicans for the Republicans, over and over and over again are saying, I'm going to vote for Trump. Is that even those who didn't like him in the first place, uh, you know, are coming back to



Trump. Yet at the same time, they are saying the rest of the ticket, I'm not going to vote for, uh, this this person is is not as Trump as Trump should be, or this person is not as conservative as he should be, or I don't agree with what this. And so we're seeing Republicans split the ticket. What's the problem with that? And how can we reassure Republicans that that's not the way to go?

**Harry Knight:** Well, it's not the way to go. And we'll get into a little bit of reasons of why that is. And you do see some of that from some of our, our groups. And this is nothing new. We've seen this in election cycles for years. Um, the problem is, is you'll get a small group of people that have a big megaphone but don't actually carry a lot of weight, but they make a lot of noise. And the problem is, is, you know, they start to influence others because others start to listen and people start to think about what's going on. But at the end of the day. When you're in a general election, whether you like it or not. And your Republican leaning. So the example that you gave is I'm voting for Trump because I like Trump's principles, and I like how he would handle things on the economy. I like the way he would handle, uh, foreign affairs and all of those kinds of things. So let's take that down to the governor's race, or let's take that down to the attorney general's race or any of these other races, the House, the Senate, if if you're in favor of those kinds of adult policies, but yet you're refusing to vote for the Republican in the general election, that's just one less vote the Democrat opponent has to overcome to win. So at the end of the day, if you're going to either not vote or vote for somebody else, all you're really doing is helping your opponents win. Um, sometimes people don't understand that, um, there's a huge difference between a primary election and a general election. Primary election is kind of like playing checkers. It's best person wins simple moves and have at it. A general election is three D chess. So if you're playing by checkers rules on A in A3D chess game, you're going to lose. And unfortunately we have a small population that will do that.

**Reuel Sample:** And that's for the reason why we as a party, both in the state and here in the county, we don't we don't endorse candidates during primaries. We can't. Is that that's a time for the population to tell us.

**Harry Knight:** On the candidates. Yeah, primaries are up for the candidates and their candidate committees. And it's, you know, run on the platform that you want to run on. And it's up to the voters. The voters truly get to choose in a primary.

**Reuel Sample:** Let's talk about, uh, the, uh, these final minutes, uh, elections are expensive, and they're getting more and more expensive. And there's no doubt that, uh, uh, uh, the Democrat Party and their operatives are pushing money into North Carolina like mad so that, uh, Planned Parenthood is putting \$10 million into North Carolina. Uh, New Hanover County is a battleground county where we go. So does the rest of the state go, and all that takes money. And, uh, folks get emails constantly from the National party, but our local party gets none of that. So how can folks, how can folks help out here in New Hanover County? And where does the money go?

**Harry Knight:** Well, there's two things that you can do if you care about local politics and you should care about local politics, because, like how we opened up this entire discussion. Guess what determines your tax rates? Guess what determines the curriculum and the teachers and how good the teachers are in your schools? Local politics. I don't care who the president is, they ain't figuring out who your school board members are, who your city council members are, who your board of commissioners are. Local politics affects you every day, so pay attention to those. So the thing that you can do is if you want to help the the GOP party, you know, me, my team and all the other members that are associated with this, you can go to the [NewHanoverCountyGOP.org](http://NewHanoverCountyGOP.org) page and there's a donate button there you can give individually. You can do, um, a reoccurring payment for 15 to keep our office open. We have our own office in there, but obviously we have expenses associated with that. So you need funding for that. Or you can also go and vote directly or, um, make donations to your individual candidates that you want to choose.

**Harry Knight:** Because each one of those candidates, we're going to be spending a whole bunch of money running ads, door knocking, um, TV, the works supporting our Republican candidates as a whole, as a team, because that's what we do as the New Hanover County GOP. Each one of those candidates are also going to be running their own individual ads and, um, fliers and door knocking and other things, and all of that takes money. So and every penny counts. I mean, if you can afford \$5, give \$5. If you can afford 50, give 50. If you can give more, more power to you. But at the end of the day, when you have 160,000 registered voters in New Hanover County, and every one of those would give \$5, that makes a difference. It's a lot of money. So thinking that, hey, you know, my \$5 doesn't matter. Well, yes, it does when it when it's combined with

a few thousand others. You know, that's another TV ad to help, you know, get the right board of election or board of education members elected.

**Reuel Sample:** And every dollar that people give to, whether it's whether the candidates here or whether it's to the the, uh, county party stays here in New Hanover, it doesn't go up.

**Harry Knight:** That's right. That money gets. Yeah. That money gets spent here. We do not provide money either to the state party or to the federal level party. That money stays in New Hanover County and gets used in New Hanover County. So when you're donating \$5 and a thousand other people donate \$5, that's \$5,000 that somebody in New Hanover County, whether it's a billboard operator or a newspaper ad or some small print company that's going to print fliers. That money goes right back into our own economy. That money gets spent here.

**Reuel Sample:** Mr. Executive Director, how can people get in touch with you? How can they share their thoughts? How can they, uh how how can they, uh, communicate with you?

**Harry Knight:** Well, you can go again to the [NewHanoverCountygop.org](http://NewHanoverCountygop.org) page. You will find me there. Or you can just email me directly at [Executivedirector@NewHanoverCountygop.org](mailto:Executivedirector@NewHanoverCountygop.org) and uh, I depending on the volume of emails it I may not respond instantly, but I respond to every email and then you'll also find my my phone number and everything else is there. And there's a great team, uh, surrounding me that goes here. Like our volunteer coordinator, uh, you mentioned her name earlier because she was the executive director, Beth Fry. Absolutely outstanding. You want to come and and go to work and help some of these candidates, or help the GOP in general? Beth has a job for you. I promise we can put you to productive use. You'll have fun. You'll learn a lot, and we need the help.

**Reuel Sample:** And I'll mention the rest of your team. Nevin. Nevin Carr is the chair who is doing an incredible job. He's he's he he's got a fire and a philosophical outlook that is second to none. You've got Rick Wilkins as our first, uh, first vice chair. Who? He he just he's unstoppable. I never want to get on his wrong side. And Lisa LaVoie, who is who is who is, uh, working with all of our precinct chairs and and getting out the vote,

and, and, uh, our treasurer, Don Rudy and our, uh, our our secretary, Donna. I call her the Donner because she just is on top of everything. And so it's an amazing dream team that, uh, that you are helping to coordinate.

**Harry Knight:** Yeah, every one of those members knows how to do their job. They do it well. They enjoy it. They're a pleasure to be around. Even when you're having problems. They can all work together and find solutions and get things done. So it's just a great team to have around.

**Reuel Sample:** Harry Knight. Thank you very much, Mr. Executive Director here in New Hanover County. I look forward to talking with you more, looking forward to talking, uh, and your leadership and and getting things done here in New Hanover County. Thanks for being here.

**Harry Knight:** Yes, sir. Thank you. And thank you for having me.