

## **Matt Leatherman Stump Speech**

I want to thank you all for giving me the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Matt Leatherman, and I'm running to be your next North Carolina State Treasurer. Now I know you've all seen politicians of every stripe come out here to tell you their personal story and how it led them to run for office. And I know some of them were pretty good at it, too. But I want to do something a little bit different today. Instead of talking about my story, I'd like to tell you something different.

This story is about my family and how preventative care saved the life of my daughter.

Two and a half years ago, my wife and I were sitting together in our home in Raleigh. It was New Year's Eve, and so we were preparing for the evening's festivities, but something didn't feel quite right. See at the time, Keisha was 27-weeks pregnant with our second child, and everything about her pregnancy had gone perfectly to that point. But that night, something was wrong: my wife couldn't feel our baby.

At first, we tried to rationalize away the feeling—the Holidays had been stressful, it was going to be a busy evening—whatever words we could think to say. But the mothers in this room understand something that Keisha also knew, implicitly: when something feels off about your pregnancy, something is wrong. And it turns out that night, my wife was right. Our baby wasn't moving.

So we start making calls. The first person we attempt to contact is my wife's obstetrician, but the phone goes straight to voicemail. Next, we try her general practitioner—but there's no answer. Finally, with our options running out, and the night coming to a close, my wife removes her public employee health insurance card from her wallet and dials the number of a preventative care line. A voice picks up on the other end. Keisha begins describing her symptoms. When she's finished, the nurse tells her that she needs to get to a hospital, now.

At 10:00 PM on New Year's Eve, 2017, my wife is admitted to an obstetric triage in Chapel Hill. For the next seven hours, she is hooked up to a machine that monitors her condition while I split time between consults with the nurses' team and waiting by her side. At 5:00 AM Sunday morning, the doctors make the decision to deliver, and they come to Keisha's room. We are separated from one another—I am taken to an observation deck, while she is wheeled off to the operating room. At 5:30 AM, my wife begins an emergency C-Section procedure; at 6:00 AM, our daughter, Josie, is born. Delivered 13 weeks premature, Josie is immediately incubated and sent to intensive care. For the next 142 days, our daughter battles for her life in the University of North Carolina NICU. I cannot tell you the number of times Keisha and I feared that Josie wouldn't make it alive. But she did. And it's all because my wife had access to a hotline for preventative care.

In those unthinkable moments when a life is at stake, our immediate instinct is to cast blame. As humans, we assume we can find reason in the chaos—that there's a culprit or a perpetrator on whom we can place our dismay. But there's no blame to be found in my daughter's birth. This wasn't Keisha's fault or Josie's. It wasn't the obstetrician's fault or the general practitioner's—and it sure as hell wasn't the fault of the doctors who saved Josie's life. The fault, to the extent that there was any, was in nature. Nature, who is notorious for making permanent havoc of little mistakes. Every day, I look at my daughter, and I am thankful there weren't any complications. Because I know that most folks aren't as lucky as my family was. There are so many people for whom little mistakes ruin the rest of their lives.

Misunderstanding your policy coverage. Taking out a payday loan during company layoffs. Missing a credit card payment by a day and suffering through charges you can't pay—the little mistakes that ruin everything. And when all we can expect from North Carolinians is to do their best with what they have,

they should be able to expect our help when their best—whether because of nature or because of bad luck—isn't enough. Help from a system that has their backs, and for the politicians running that system to care more about the people of this state than they do themselves. That's why I'm running for the Treasurer's office.

Now before I continue, I'd like your help in demonstrating the importance of what it is we're doing here. So do me a favor: raise your hand, if you, or anybody you know, has ever had a hand in crafting the state budget. Okay, let's try another one: raise your hand if you, or anybody you know, has ever had to litigate a case. Okay. Now, raise your hand, if you've ever been to a hospital or seen a specialist. Raise your hand, if you'd like to one day retire. Raise your hand, if your community has ever wanted to build a new school, a new library, a new public safety building, and keep your hand raised if you answered yes to any of these questions. Because in 2020, you have the opportunity to select the person who's going to work with you, and your doctors, and your local politicians, to ensure that this state looks out for you.

It's no small thing to be elected state Treasurer. North Carolina is a diverse state with so many different needs and conflicting priorities that it's almost impossible to balance them all. When I served as Janet Cowell's policy director during her two terms as Treasurer, I was able to see these needs up close. Working in the treasurer's office showed me, firsthand, the value of supporting our communities and working for their benefit instead our own. Unfortunately, I can't say the same for our current Treasurer.

To his credit, Dale Folwell, is trying. He really is trying to do a good job. And it may be the case that with another four years in office, Dale may finally have enough experience to serve effectively as Treasurer. But the problem isn't simply his performance. See, fundamentally, Dale Folwell doesn't believe that his job is to help protect the freedoms of North Carolinians. He believes that it's his job, instead, to protect the people like him: folks who aren't affected by the little mistakes. Folks who have so much money that they can afford, as an example, to pay out of pocket for unique medical issues like diabetes or asthma or chronic bronchitis.

But here's something that Dale doesn't understand about freedom: we're not free, when we have to choose between our finances and the health of our loved ones. We're not free when we have to choose between the treatment we need and the treatment we're able to afford. My family owns a farm out in Granville County that we're not able to move to because it's not in close enough proximity to a hospital: we're not free when we're not able to choose where we're going to live and work and raise our families.

It's the kind of freedom that we don't normally think about. It's the freedom to take action as opposed to the privilege to abstain from actions that don't affect us, and right now, we need as much action we can get. Our state legislature is attempting to strip the votes and voices of our citizens. Republican candidates are actively participating in election fraud. Our current state Treasurer wants to pay doctors and hospitals less, so rural and small community health centers are shut down—our politicians aren't protecting us. It seems like more and more they're forgetting that, in order to love our neighbors as ourselves, we must first remember that we are our neighbors. It's a lesson I won't ever forget.

Because if my wife wasn't a public school teacher, she wouldn't have had access to that preventative care line. If the doctor's hands had slipped, even a little, my daughter wouldn't be here. When you go through emergency surgery; when you get laid off; when you lose your house or your loved ones; when your schools are in disrepair—that affects me. Because that could just as well be me. If the pendulum had swung the other way, it would have been me. We need politicians who are working to increase the margin of error: we need leaders who are willing to speak out for us and have our backs. I'm running for the Treasurer of North Carolina because I want to rebuild a system that was designed to work for every single one of us. Because I know all too well how devastating those little mistakes can be.

Thank you for your time.