

John Russell's Announcement Speech

Text of John Russell's speech, as prepared for delivery on Saturday, December 02 in Worthington, Ohio, and released by his campaign, in which he announced that he is seeking election in the 12th Congressional District in 2018:

Hello. It's good to see everybody—thank you all for coming. My name is John Russell. For the last five years, I've been running my business as a farmer over in Galena. Some of you have seen me around town, others of you have bought produced from me. But even more of you know me from the story we've shared together.

About this time last year, at the Old Worthington Library, a group of organizers and concerned citizens came together at a meeting to defend the Affordable Care Act. This meeting, in itself, was a remarkable event. As most of you know, organizing without an election is difficult enough, but at that time, we were only a few months removed from the presidential race. In any other year, this meeting would have been completely unattended, and so I wasn't sure of what to expect. When I arrived at the event; when I walked through the door with my clipboard and petition, I was hoping to see, at most, 20 organizers. Instead, I was greeted by the energy of a hundred people ready to fight for our healthcare rights, people who were ready to organize for their fellow citizens.

It was an unbelievable sight to see.

What happened next gave me hope for our future as a country. When we were confronted by fear and divisiveness, ordinary citizens stood up and said "Enough." It began with our petition—we started that meeting with tens of signatures, and over the next couple of weeks, that list grew to thousands of names, each one of us demanding that our representative held a townhall to address our concerns. Word of what we were doing spread. Many of you began organizing on a greater scale: you hosted events and meetings, made phone calls and wrote postcards; a group of you have been meeting here, rain or shine, for the last 44 weeks, raising your voice to power. We helped to start a movement—we showed the rest of the country that this *can* be done.

Through your efforts, we were able to hold a townhall of our own, drawing in more than 1,000 people. And although our Congressman was absent, we were able to broadcast our message to the national stage, ensuring that our questions were heard and forcing our politicians to ask themselves what possible benefit could come from denying more than 24-million Americans their fundamental right to healthcare. Now, only a few short months later, our Congressman has announced that he is stepping down from his position. Once again, we need to fight for ourselves. And this is why I stand before you, proud to announce that I'm running for Congress in Ohio's 12th district.

The past year has been a period of change for a lot of people. It's been a year marked by fear and anxiety, a constant worry that we've all shared, but the people here today are proof that there is still good to be had—things that we can still accomplish. Because although this has been a time of fear, it has also been a time of hope; in this time, we have been forced to pull together in order to preserve the principles and beliefs that make us American. You all have demonstrated that, time and time again.

But the fight can't just come from our activists; it needs to come from our politicians, too. I grew up in Wellsville, a small, working-class town in the Ohio Valley. It's a community with a proud history of labor; at one point, we made pottery and steel for the world. But that was more than half a century ago: for over forty years, Wellsville watched as its economy fell out from underneath it. Jobs left in the

masses, and things got bad in a hurry. Good people were laid off and struggled to find work. Benefits and healthcare plans took a hit. Opiate addiction claimed the lives of childhood friends. The less we had, the worse it got. And it felt like our leaders in Washington either weren't aware of what was happening, or just didn't care at all.

So back in May, when the United States House of Representatives passed a bill that would have eliminated the Affordable Care Act, I felt that same lack of responsibility from our representatives. They still weren't aware of the stakes; they've never had to witness the cost that comes with leaving people behind. And that's why I'm running for Congress: to fight for our healthcare, to fight for our paychecks. I'm running to make sure that we all have the opportunity to make a decent living. I'm running to fight against an opiate epidemic that has destroyed countless lives. I'm running to get money out of politics and fight for a system where our work and our votes count for something. I'm running to be a voice for everyone in our district, in a time where we need representation the most.

Now, I know what people are saying: nobody believes that it can be done. They say it's because the people in Clintonville live differently from the people in Newark, from the people in Mansfield. They believe that the citizens in our district are too different from one another for a message like ours to resonate. They've heard the D.C. insiders who've preached over and over again that it's nearly impossible to win in districts like ours. It's too partisan; it's too rural; it's too urban; it's too poor; it's too rich. Our community is seen by political pundits as unwinnable for people who think like us and sound like we do. But I'm here to tell you something different: the insiders in Washington are wrong.

We don't vote for candidates because they're Democrat or Republican; we vote for candidates based on whether we believe they're invested in us as people. What we want is to know, more than anything, is that the candidates we vote for will work for us and represent our interests. This means we want them present: in our cities and communities; in our gatherings and our townhalls. Now, every decent candidate in the world will tell you that they want to hear from their constituents. But hardly any candidates—Democrat or Republican—will stop and *listen* when you tell them what you're thinking. When you tell them what you hope for, when you tell them what you're afraid of. That is the attitude we need from candidates in our district.

So we're going to do things a little bit differently in this election. Our campaign isn't going to be the same campaign that is run in this district year after year; it isn't going to be like the campaigns that D.C. consultants tell every candidate to run. Because we already know that those campaigns won't succeed in the 12th district—they haven't worked here in the past, and they aren't going to work here now. And the reason they don't work here is simple: those campaigns don't care about the way things are, they only care about what things look like when there are people watching.

I'm talking about the candidates who attend townhalls just so they can boast to their constituents about their personal achievements. I'm talking about the candidates who claim to represent this district's citizens, but only have time to speak with national donors and corporate lobbyists. I'm talking about the candidates who say that they care about the 12th district—all of it, every county—but have never knocked on a door outside of Columbus. We've had a long history in this district of candidates claiming to care about us and the struggles that we face. But we've never had a candidate who is willing to meet us where we live and speak with us about the problems we're facing every day.

If we want to win this election, if we want to achieve something that has been said so long to be impossible, we need to empower the voices of every citizen in this district. So this is pledge to you: my campaign is going to be headed to Licking County, and Morrow and Richland. We're going to be in Zanesville, in Newark and Johnstown, in Mansfield and Granville. Clintonville, too. We're going to step foot on every inch of this district because the people of this district deserve nothing less. Together, we can

bring the change that this district needs: we can stand up for our communities and our workers and ourselves. We make politics something to be proud of again.

My name is John Russell, and I am running for Congress.

Thank you