

## John Russell Stump Speech

Hello everyone, it's good to see all of you. My name is John Russell. For the last five years, I've run a small business, farming produce and grinding tree stumps in Galena. I grew up in rural Ohio—I was the kid you saw at every county fair through eleven years of 4-H. I left to earn an agricultural science degree from Cornell University, and returned to rural Ohio to start my business and be close to family. And I'm here today because I'm running to be the next representative of Ohio's 12<sup>th</sup> Congressional District.

For the last 17 years, our district has been represented by the same Congressman. And if 17 years feels like a long period of time, that's because a lot has changed since 2001. But since the moment he was elected to office, our Congressman's priorities have stayed the same. Whether it was voting to take away our healthcare or passing a tax bill that sells out our middle-class families; whether it was refusing to hold a townhall and leaving to speak at a fundraiser in another district instead—our Congressman's record shows who he's stood for. It shows that our gains have come despite his representation, not because of it.

But finally, after 17 years, our Congressman has called it quits, and there's going to a special election held in August to replace him. And for the first time in 17 years, we have the opportunity to win this seat. But we know that if Democrats want any chance of taking back the House, it *has to start* with this seat. And that means that, in this election, our efforts have to start with events like this one.

We are meeting at a defining moment in American politics. This is not by accident. Not since the days of the Cold War has our country existed in such a constant state of anxiety. The progress we've made in the last decade is under attack, and every day the rights and values that make this country great are called into question. Whether we're children in the need of healthcare, or working-class people looking for the chance to earn a living; whether we're dreamers living in our adopted homes, or students living in debt—we are all looking to feel at ease again.

Over the past year, our citizens have been fighting day in and day out to protect these values, and time and time again our leaders in Washington have shown us they aren't willing to meet us at the door. But six months from now, we're going to show the rest of the country that we still have a say in our future.

We're going to show them that our voices are stronger than they could have ever imagined.

It's going to take a lot to win this seat. And it starts by building a campaign that is focused on bringing the citizens of this district together—one that's driven by groups of people coming from every corner of the district to have a stake in our success. Neighbors talking to neighbors; friends talking to friends. This is a time, more than ever, where we need to re-establish in the importance of community, to come together to build something that we can all share.

Because our communities are where we learn our values—they help create our foundations as people. Like many of you, the person that I am today was shaped by the town I was raised in. I grew up in Wellsville. It's a small, working-class town of 3,500 people in the Ohio Valley. My family has owned small businesses there going back generations, starting with my great grandfather, who sold boots to railroad workers in the late 1800s. His son, my grandfather, milked cows before retiring into the local bank, where my dad eventually followed. My mom and grandma taught in public schools, where they raised the kids they taught as their own—it was that kind of a community.

Now, in its prime, Wellsville was a picture of middle-class stability. Our factories churned out pottery and steel for the world. And this stability was important for my family's businesses—we couldn't have

succeeded, if the people in our community didn't have decent jobs of their own. But I grew up in a different time, when the economy was bottoming out after a forty-year slide. Jobs and opportunities had dried up, and families struggled to find their footing. And in a high school graduating class of 55 kids, three of the guys I played football with ended up losing their lives to opiate addiction.

But even through this pain and hardship, I watched our community pull together. No matter how bad things got, we still did the best we could for the people we saw every day. And that's where my values come from. Nobody told me about second chances; I saw them when my father worked with people who fell behind on their bank payments to keep them in their homes. Nobody told me the importance of caring for my neighbors; I witnessed it when the members of my church went out into the community and painted up faded houses for free. Nobody told me to always look on the bright side; I learned it from watching my mom decorate the windows of local businesses on Main Street, with every changing season, for more than 25 years. No matter how tough times were or how many businesses shuttered their doors, she still gave people a reason to smile.

It's a story that replays itself over and over again in communities all across America. Because at the end of the day, no matter the issues that divide us, we all share a common belief in the promise of this country. That if we work hard, we can get ahead; that if we make a mistake, we'll have the chance to make things right. I'm here today because I believe in this promise, and so do the people of this district. I'm here today because I'm willing to fight to make sure that this promise is kept.

This election is our chance to decide what kind of future we want, for our generation and the ones that come after it. I'm talking about a future where the economy works for everyone. A future with lower healthcare costs and quality coverage. A future where our retirement system provides dignity after a lifetime spent working. A future where we invest in skilled-trade jobs; where we heal the wounds of opiate addiction; where we eliminate the power of money in politics, so our voices can be heard again.

But most importantly, I'm talking about a future where we replace Congressmen and women who tell us that they don't have the time, the commitment or the courage to show up and answer our questions. I'm here today, because it shouldn't cost you a dime to ask your representatives questions. And I look forward to hearing yours.

My name is John Russell, and I'm running to be your Congressman.