

North Carolina Legislator Profile

Joel Ford: Senate District 38

Mecklenburg County

"We need to be sensitive to religious freedom and respecting individual rights, and that has proven to be difficult because of people who look for tolerance while they themselves are intolerant" – Joel Ford, [3/25/15](#)

This installment of Real Facts NC's legislator profile series focuses on Senator Joel Ford, a Democrat from Mecklenburg County. Ford, a self-proclaimed "recovering entrepreneur" who has bought and sold several businesses, was elected to the NC Senate in 2012 after a brief stint as a political consultant. Ford, formerly a VP of the [embattled Cardinal Innovations Healthcare](#), came in a distant third in Charlotte's 2017 mayoral election.

Ford took an anti-LGBTQ stance during the HB2 controversy and aftermath, even sponsoring a failed repeal bill based on an indefinite moratorium for nondiscrimination ordinances. During the Charlotte mayoral race, Ford responded to a constituent who expressed concerns about his record on LGBTQ issues with a gif of a dog pooping. Ford's record of looking out for himself first has been proven time and time again.

Summary:

Ford mocked the LGBTQ community on Twitter and has supported bills that take away the civil rights of LGBTQ North Carolinians

- *Ford tweeted a GIF of a dog pooping in response to a constituent concerned about his record on LGBTQ issues*
- *Ford attempted to repeal HB2 with a bill that included an indefinite moratorium on nondiscrimination ordinances, essentially the same as a proposal made by Senator Phil Berger*
- *Ford voted for Phil Berger's bill that would allow magistrates to recuse themselves from performing same-sex marriages*

Ford looks out for himself first. He entered into politics because of his business failures, was vice president of a managed care organization criticized for lavish spending

- *Ford claimed he got into politics because "the Mecklenburg County Commission entered into a disposal agreement with a competitor for substantially cheaper."*
- *Ford was a vice-president of Cardinal Innovations Healthcare, cited in a 2017 state audit for "questionable" spending. He stepped down after controversy and received nearly \$52k severance.*

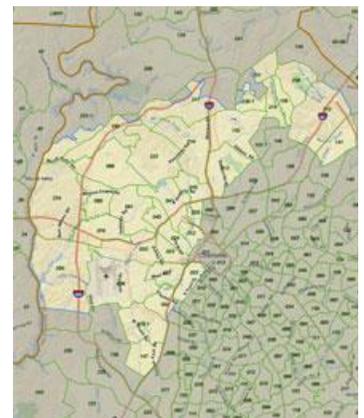
Ford, who was paid by Duke Energy for "professional fees," voted for the "Duke Bailout Bill" that was "damning proof" families could not rely on the state to protect drinking water from pollution like coal ash.

- *Duke Bailout Bill" would raise rates for average NC families by \$18 per year for 25 years*
- *Ford voted for so-called "polluter protection act" which allowed polluters to be exempted from civil penalties for their pollution.*

Sen. Joel Ford



Senate District 38



Ford mocked the LGBTQ community on Twitter and has supported bills that take away the civil rights of LGBTQ North Carolinians

Ford: “We need to be sensitive to religious freedom and respecting individual rights,” called people seeking equal marriage rights “intolerant.” “Representing a safe Democratic district encompassing all of Charlotte's west side, Ford's centrism is out of principle instead of fear, but his votes for fracking and a senate bill allowing magistrates to recuse themselves from marrying gay couples has angered North Carolina's progressive community. "We need to be sensitive to religious freedom and respecting individual rights, and that has proven to be difficult because of people who look for tolerance while they themselves are intolerant," says Ford, who opposed Amendment One, but wants to strike a balance during this social change. "One of my colleagues said, 'Joel your problem is you saw the bill as a tool, and others saw it as a weapon, and you're not going to change their mind.'" (Creative Loafing, [3/25/15](#))

Ford cast a ballot for Amendment 1 that made marriage between a man and a woman the only legally recognized union. “Ford says in 2012 he cast a ballot as a voter for Amendment 1, a constitutional amendment that, until it was superseded by the U.S. Supreme Court, made marriage between a man and woman the state’s only legally recognized union. In 2015 he was one of two Senate Democrats who voted for SB 2, a Republican bill that allowed civil magistrates to recuse themselves from performing same-sex marriages.” (Charlotte Observer, [8/25/17](#))

Ford tweeted a GIF of a dog pooping in response to a constituent concerned about his record on LGBTQ issues

Ford tweeted the dog GIF in response to someone on Twitter calling him “homophobic.” “A North Carolina senator and Charlotte mayoral candidate has apologized to an LGBT activist over a tweet some found offensive, though the fight is likely to carry over into the city’s Democratic mayoral primary. Sen. Joel Ford Wednesday apologized to Matt Comer for a tweet that depicted a defecating dog, calling it “inappropriate.” Ford came after someone on Twitter – not Comer – who had criticized the senator as “homophobic.” Comer jumped in with criticism of Ford, leading to the tweet with the dog.” (News & Observer, [3/15/17](#))

Ford’s campaign manager said Ford’s GIF use would be limited following the incident. “Joel Ford drew controversy on Twitter late Tuesday night when he responded to users with animated GIF images, including the image of a defecating dog. Ford is a Democratic state senator who is also running for Charlotte mayor. Now, his campaign manager says Ford will be restricted in the GIFs he can use in the future. The defecating dog tweet was sent at 11:13 p.m. Tuesday in response to a series of criticisms from Twitter users @TheMattComer and @WhalerCane. Both users were criticizing Ford's record on LGBT issues. Matt Comer is a self-described LGBT activist and the former editor of QNotes, an LGBT-oriented newspaper.” (WFAE, [3/15/17](#))

The Charlotte Observer editorial board said Ford’s tweet “stepped over a few” lines that should not be crossed. “If there’s one thing we’ve learned these past 12 months, it’s that people have wildly different expectations about the behavior of their elected officials. Used to be that although we like our leaders to be fighters, we didn’t really want them to hit below the belt. Then Donald Trump ran for president, and all the rules went away. We still believe some lines shouldn’t be crossed, however, and we think N.C. Sen. Joel Ford just stepped over a few. Ford, who’s running for Charlotte mayor, posted a distasteful photo Tuesday night during a Twitter conversation that included a couple of critics. The post was unbecoming of someone who says he’d like to lead our city. We wonder now if he’s ready for the responsibility.” (Charlotte Observer, [3/15/17](#))

Ford attempted to repeal HB2 with a bill that included an indefinite moratorium on nondiscrimination ordinances, essentially the same as a proposal made by Senator Phil Berger

- **NOTE:** Ford sponsored S332 (S332, referred to Senate Rules, [3/22/17](#))

Ford's HB2 repeal bill included a moratorium for nondiscrimination ordinances. "Sen. Joel Ford, a Charlotte Democrat, introduced a bill that would repeal House Bill 2, but also establish a moratorium for non-discrimination ordinances. The "cool down" period would last for 30 days after the General Assembly adjourns." (Fox8, [3/21/17](#))

Ford's bill is "essentially the same" as Senate President Pro Tem Phil Berger's December 2016 HB2 repeal proposal. "Ford's bill is essentially the same as a proposal made in December by Senate President Pro Tem Phil Berger, an Eden Republican. That failed when 16 Senate Republicans joined Ford and other Democrats in defeating it. Democrat Roy Cooper, then the governor-elect, encouraged Democrats to oppose Berger's bill. Neither the governor's office or Berger's office was immediately available for comment." (Charlotte Observer, [3/21/17](#))

Ford voted for Phil Berger's bill that would allow magistrates to recuse themselves from performing same-sex marriages

- **Note:** Ford voted for S2 (S2, Senate 2nd Reading, [2/25/15](#))

Ford voted for anti-LGBT magistrate recusal bill. "Last session Ford voted for the so-called magistrates bill. The Republican-sponsored measure would have allowed civil magistrates to recuse themselves from performing same-sex marriages." (Charlotte Observer, [3/15/17](#); S2, Veto Overridden; [6/11/15](#))

Senate Bill 2 would allow magistrates to opt out of performing all marriages based on religious objection. "Senate Bill 2 allows magistrates to opt-out of performing weddings and registers of deeds from issuing licenses if they have sincerely held religious beliefs. This bill was filed in response to the legalization of gay marriage in the state." WRAL reported, "Although the measure would require magistrates and clerks in the county register of deeds offices to opt out of participating in all weddings, it is clearly a reaction to federal court rulings that struck down North Carolina's ban on same-sex marriage." (News & Observer, [4/30/15](#); WRAL, [2/25/15](#); S2, Veto Overridden; [6/11/15](#))

Opponents of S2 argued "the state should not be in the business of allowing officers of the court to opt (out) of their duties." "Senate Bill 2 would establish procedures by which magistrates can be recused from performing all lawful marriages and assistant and deputy registers of deeds can be recused from issuing all lawful marriage licenses, based upon a sincerely held religious objection. The recusal would be for a minimum of six months and would continue until the recusal is rescinded in writing. Officials so recusing themselves would not be subject to prosecution for failing to perform the duties imposed upon them by law." According to WRAL, "Opponents of the bill said the state should not be in the business of allowing officers of the court to opt of their duties based on religious objections." (Summary of S2, Retrieved [5/5/15](#); WRAL, [2/25/15](#); S2, Veto Overridden; [6/11/15](#))

All four McDowell County magistrates refused to perform same-sex marriages. "Magistrates in McDowell County are refusing to perform same sex marriages. A supervising judge confirmed to News 13 on Thursday that four workers in the office - Hilary Hollified, Thomas Atkinson, Debbie Terrell and Chad Johnson - have recused themselves under the North Carolina's religious exemption law. The office has had an arrangement for approximately two months with other magistrates driving in to cover marriage services here. A Rutherford County magistrate told News 13 he and another second magistrate have been driving a half hour back and forth three times a week to cover duties... There are 32 magistrates across North Carolina who had recused themselves from performing marriages." (WLOS, [9/10/15](#))

Ford looks out for himself first. He entered into politics because of his business failures, was vice president of a managed care organization criticized for lavish spending

Ford claimed he got into politics because “the Mecklenburg County Commission entered into a disposal agreement with a competitor for substantially cheaper.”

Ford claimed he got into politics because “the Mecklenburg County Commission entered into a disposal agreement with a competitor for substantially cheaper.” “‘Knee deep in picking up garbage and trying to make payroll,’ the serial entrepreneur didn’t get interested in politics until the Mecklenburg County Commission entered into a disposal agreement with a competitor for substantially cheaper. ‘They didn’t know the impact of their decisions on small businesses,’ he says.” (Creative Loafing, [3/25/15](#))

He started his waste management business with a loan from the city of Charlotte. “In 1994, at 25, he moved to Atlanta for a job as an account executive with Waste Management. He returned five years later and started his own waste business, Ford Container, with the help of a \$37,000 city loan.” (Charlotte Observer, [8/25/17](#))

He sold the business when it became unprofitable, invested other businesses that have all since been sold. “When the business later became unprofitable, he sold it. By then he’d gotten involved in a series of other ventures. In 2002 he helped start Premier Barber Shop and Salon in the old Eastland Mall. Three years later he became a managing partner in a University City restaurant called Junior’s Chicken and Waffles. Both were sold. In 2011 he started The Network Group, a nonprofit designed to connect aspiring business men and women. And in 2012 he created Sacco Street Consulting, which has since dissolved. Then Ford went to work for his friend Stoney Sellars at StoneLaurel, a management consulting firm.” (Charlotte Observer, [8/25/17](#))

Ford was a vice-president of Cardinal Innovations Healthcare, cited in a 2017 state audit for “questionable” spending. He stepped down after controversy and received nearly \$52k severance.

Cardinal’s lavish Christmas parties and board retreats, CEO pay, charter flights, and “questionable” credit card purchases were subject of a 2017 state audit. “Democratic Sen. Joel Ford is a vice president of Charlotte-based Cardinal Innovations Healthcare, North Carolina’s largest state-funded mental health managed care organization. It operates in 20 counties, has a budget of \$682 million and insures one of every four Medicaid patients in the state. Last month State Auditor Beth Wood ripped Cardinal for spending on lavish Christmas parties and board retreats, CEO pay, charter flights for executives and “questionable” credit card purchases including alcohol. All of that, the report said, threatened to “erode public trust.”” (Charlotte Observer, [6/02/17](#))

State auditor’s report “ripped” Cardinal for spending that threatened to “erode public trust.” “Last month State Auditor Beth Wood ripped Cardinal for spending on lavish Christmas parties and board retreats, CEO pay, charter flights for executives and “questionable” credit card purchases including alcohol. All of that, the report said, threatened to “erode public trust.” While Ford, a candidate for mayor, acknowledges the audit findings, he defends his position with the taxpayer-funded Cardinal. He said he checked legislative guidelines, which say there’s no inherent conflict as long as lawmakers don’t vote on measures that directly impact their financial gain.” (Charlotte Observer, [6/02/17](#))

Cardinal paid nearly \$52k to Ford in severance after he stepped down during controversy. “Embattled mental health agency Cardinal Innovations, under fire for recent million-dollar severances, has paid millions more in severance than previously reported. Cardinal has paid \$6.1 million in severance in the past three years, including nearly \$52,000 to a state senator. [...] In response to a request from the Charlotte Observer, a Cardinal spokeswoman disclosed the additional severance payments. That included \$51,940 to Sen. Joel Ford in October. Ford became vice president of Cardinal

last year at a salary of \$150,000 and stepped down this fall. He lost September's Democratic primary for Charlotte mayor." (Greensboro News & Record, [12/13/17](#))

Ford, who was paid by Duke Energy for "professional fees," voted for the "Duke Bailout Bill" that was "damning proof" families could not rely on the state to protect drinking water from pollution like coal ash.

Ford listed "professional fees" from Duke Energy on his 2012 Statement of Economic Interest, Ford has filed "no change" forms since 2012. (2012 Statement of Economic Interest, Joel D. Ford, page 5, question 10)

"Duke Bailout Bill" would raise rates for average NC families by \$18 per year for 25 years

➤ **NOTE:** Ford voted for H630 (H630, signed [7/14/16](#))

SELC attorney said "Duke Bailout Bill" is "damning proof" that families cannot rely on state to protect drinking water from Duke Energy's pollution. "Environmental groups quickly chastised the legislation. 'This coal ash bill is damning proof that the families and communities of North Carolina can't rely on state politicians to protect their drinking water supplies from Duke Energy's coal ash pollution,' said Frank Holleman, senior attorney at the Southern Environmental Law Center, in a statement. Added Holleman: 'This Duke Bailout Bill is a betrayal of the North Carolina people who participated in good faith in the process and followed the rules established by the legislature in 2014. Public participation led to the conclusion that the law and science require Duke Energy to excavate its coal ash from its leaking, unlined pits. Duke Energy didn't like the results and so today the North Carolina Senate turned its back on the people and clean water and threw into the trash can public process, facts, science, and the law.'" (WUNC, [6/29/16](#))

H630 "foregoes the creation of a separate commission," but also creates "new rules" for timetable cleanup. "That debate came to head on Feb. 2, 2014, when a coal ash pond in Rockingham County spilled tons of the material into the Dan River. Lawmakers responded to that bill by crafting a bill that designated virtually all of the company's 33 coal ash ponds as either high or medium risk. Those designations meant that Duke would eventually have to remove that ash from the ponds. But when McCrory won a lawsuit against the General Assembly, lawmakers were forced to redraw the bill. That new measure, [which is now part of House Bill 630](#), not only foregoes the creation of a separate commission, it creates new rules for when coal ash must be dug up from pits." (WRAL, [6/28/16](#))

Bill had backing of Duke and McCrory. "But the bill has the backing of state senators, Duke and the McCrory administration. "I want to thank you for vesting your trust in my department for implementing the Coal Ash Management Act," DEQ Secretary Donald van der Vaart told the Senate Rules Committee Tuesday." (WRAL, [6/28/16](#))

Covering coal ash in unlined pits "could continue allowing toxic pollutants to escape for decades." "The reevaluation would allow regulators to see if fewer pits would need excavation. 'The deadlines in the coal ash law are too compressed to allow adequate repairs to be completed,' state environment secretary Donald van der Vaart said in a statement. 'The intent was not to set pond closure deadlines based on incomplete information. Making decisions based on incomplete information could lead to the expenditure of billions of dollars when spending millions now would provide equal or better protection.' The alternative method of closing all of Duke Energy's coal-ash basins is to drain off excess water and cover the remaining residue in plastic and dirt. Environmentalists warn covering the unlined coal ash pits could continue allowing toxic pollutants to escape for decades." (AP, [5/18/16](#))

Raising power rates for customers to clean up coal ash would raise power rates for average NC household by \$18 annually for 25 years. "Duke Energy in 2014 floated a potential cost to excavate

coal ash from 14 of its coal-burning power plants at \$10 billion. The company has said it expected to ask state utilities regulators to allow it to pass along its coal-ash bill to electricity customers. The company last year estimated the likely costs at about \$4 billion, which could raise power rates for the average North Carolina household by about \$18 a year over 25 years.” (AP, [5/18/16](#))

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