

## Fwd: Newsletter from Senator Joel Ford

Joel Ford [joeldford@gmail.com]

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Greetings Constituents and Friends,

As the legislature continues to move forward I am eager to advocate for legislation that promotes job growth. This is why earlier this year I joined the Main Street Democratic Caucus, a caucus that is meant to promote and advocate for pro-business policies that benefit working families and expands our state's economy. This caucus will promote good government, a government that consists of bipartisan work amongst the two parties in the General Assembly in order to better serve the public.

The Main Street Caucus will focus on building a strong relationship with the business community and provide common-sense solutions with emphasis on accountability, responsibility, and transparency. These are the tools that we need to promote economic growth, improve our education system, and properly invest in our communities. Our Caucus is determined to represent North Carolinians across party lines, because we believe our state is a moderate state and needs a voice in government.

As always, please continue to refer to the North Carolina General Assembly [www.ncleg.com](http://www.ncleg.com), to track information on committee meetings, bill status, legislative updates, etc. The North Carolina state government [www.ncgov.com](http://www.ncgov.com) is helpful for in-depth information regarding our state resources.

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## MAIN STREET DEMOCRATS

Watch my remarks on the new set of Democrats at the General Assembly. We are pro-business Democrats who are concerned about mainstream issues of the state of North Carolina.



\*\*\*LEGISLATIVE UPDATE\*\*\*

**SB 20 IRC Update/Gas Tax Change:** The legislature took action to update the Internal Revenue Code to comply with the Tax Increase Prevention Act that was signed into law by President Obama on December 19, 2014. The law extended nearly 50 tax provisions for 2014, which previously expired at the end of 2013.

I sponsored an amendment that would allow for debt forgiveness on principle residence for North Carolina homeowners to be excluded from their gross income. North Carolina recognizes this debt on homeowner's income and forces them to pay taxes on this forgiven debt. I proposed this amendment in order to prevent homeowners from paying this burdensome tax when they are already facing financial hardships. The federal government currently does not tax this indebtedness, but our state has decoupled from this practice. This tax only kicks people who are already down. The amendment failed and I opposed the bill during its third reading.

SB 20 also consisted of a new change to our state's gas tax rate. The current gas tax per gallon sits at 37.5 cents, which without tampering, would fall to 30 cents per gallon by this summer due to the declining price of gas. However, this bill would decrease the gas tax to 35 cents per gallon and allow it to be capped at this rate from falling any lower than 35 cents. This is a temporary tax cut and I opposed this provision because it increases the tax rate every year after its enactment. SB 20 has been sent to the House for consideration.

**New Market Start Ups:** I am co-sponsoring SB 35, which enacts the Jump Start our Business Startups Act and the new market tax credit. Startups play a critical role in creating jobs in North Carolina and this legislation will allow the legislature to promote crowd funding, which will allow companies to have access to more capital investment in our state.

**Unemployment Insurance:** The Senate passed SB 15, which would require unemployment insurance recipients to contact five potential employers per week instead of three. The law would also require applicants to provide photo identification to qualify for unemployment insurance. This bill is aimed at making the system efficient and to keep the integrity of the program.

**Individual Freedom-** The Senate debated Senate Bill 2 for roughly two hours on Wednesday, February 25, 2015. This bill would allow magistrates, assistant registers of deeds and deputy registers of deeds to recuse themselves from performing duties related to marriage ceremonies due to sincerely held religious objection. The Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) shall ensure that a magistrate is available in that jurisdiction for performance of marriages for the times required under G.S. 7A-292(b). Only for the duration of the time the AOC has not designated a magistrate to perform marriages in that jurisdiction, the chief district court judge or other such district court judge as may be designated by the chief district court judge shall be deemed a magistrate for the purposes of performing marriages. I supported this bill because it respects an individual's personal religious beliefs, and it also protects same-sex couples right to marry.

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\*\*\*DISTRICT/RELATED NEWS\*\*\*

**Health:** Over the past month, the national media has focused on vaccines and illnesses derived from the lack of proper vaccinations. As of February 5th, flu illness activity continues to be widespread throughout North Carolina, but has significantly dropped since December 2014. This outbreak is not taken lightly by medical professionals and we encourage everyone to get the proper vaccinations to prevent illnesses from spreading.

**State Issued School Report Cards:** As you may be aware, the state of North Carolina issued report cards for every public school in order to determine if schools across the state met new state standards. Many schools in our district did not meet these standards and I am committed to advocate for resources for these schools. Our children need schools that can provide adequate resources to succeed and I believe the General Assembly can provide these schools the assets it needs to meet the demands of our students.

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\*\*\*SPECIAL THANKS\*\*\*

Thank you for voicing your issues, thoughts, and concerns through your many e-mails, phone calls, and office visits. I appreciate receiving input from you and am honored to be serving you in the 2015 Long Legislative Session. Please feel free to contact me, or my office.

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