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NY bombshell: Harold Ford's record isn't all that liberal

By: RYAN UNDERWOOD
Published on January 13, 2010 in POLITICS. 16 COMMENTS

From our Gannett Washington colleague Brian Tumulty:

WASHINGTON — Former Tennessee Rep. **Harold Ford Jr.**, who's **considering running in the New York Senate primary** against Democratic incumbent Kirsten Gillibrand, would enter the race with a well-documented voting record that's more conservative than Gillibrand's on hot-button social issues such as gay rights, gun ownership and abortion.



Ford served in Congress from 1997 to 2006 during Republican majority rule (see [Tennessean slideshow](#)), when divisive social issues such as gun ownership were regularly brought up for votes. He spent the last of his five terms in office as an unsuccessful Senate candidate trying to appeal to voters around the Volunteer State who were more socially conservative than those in his Memphis-based congressional district.

Now, he's talking to New York City media outlets, testing the waters for a September battle in which he would have to appeal to 5.3 million registered Democrats, 2.8 million of whom live outside the five boroughs of New York.

Ford told the [New York Times this week](#) he still has Tennessee "driving license" for his 2008 Ford Escape and plans to make his first visit to Rochester in a few weeks.

Even so, he could be welcomed by voters.

"You don't have to be a native to the state to be accepted," said James Campbell, chairman of political science at SUNY Buffalo, pointing to successful Senate bids by former first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton and the late Robert F. Kennedy.

However, many of those Democratic primary voters tend to be liberal.

Ford, who is apparently trying to appeal to those voters, told the Times his position on abortion has been distorted or completely misrepresented.

"To say that I am pro-life is just wrong," he said in the interview. "I am personally pro-choice and legislatively pro-choice."

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But shortly before the November 2006 Tennessee Senate election in which he lost to Republican Bob Corker, Ford told Fox cable and MSNBC he was pro-life.

His congressional voting record shows he has supported abortion rights and also has supported restrictions on them.

In May 2006, Ford supported an unsuccessful effort to allow privately financed abortions at overseas military facilities. But 13 months earlier, in April 2005, he voted for the Child Interstate Abortion Notification Act barring the transportation of minor girls across state lines for the purpose of obtaining an abortion without parental notification.

Douglas Johnson, legislative director for National Right to Life Committee, said Ford also voted for an amendment that would have gutted the effectiveness of the 2005 bill. Ford tried to be on both sides of that issue, he said.

"I guess he's not pro-choice," Johnson said. "He's multiple-choice. He's a carpet-bagging, political chameleon."

Ford was unavailable Wednesday for comment. His spokesman, Davidson Goldin, did not respond to an e-mail requesting an interview.

Elizabeth Shipp, political director at NARAL Pro-Choice America, which has endorsed Gillibrand for Senate, said Ford "has always been mixed choice."

"When it's not easy, like supporting *Rose v. Wade*, Mr. Ford has left us," she said.

Ford says his position on gay marriage has evolved over the years, as have the positions of many public officials who formerly opposed the idea.

As a member of Congress, Ford voted for a proposal to amend the Constitution to define marriage as the union between a man and a woman. He has told New York City media outlets he previously favored civil unions but more recently decided to support gay marriage.

Guns are a delicate issue for Gillibrand. As a House member who supported the rights of sportsmen and hunters in her former Hudson Valley congressional district, she was backed by the National Rifle Association. But since her appointment to the Senate a year ago, she has emphasized gun safety measures important to urban areas such as New York City, because of the prevalence of violent crime.

That change in emphasis has not required her to renounce her earlier House votes. Gillibrand began serving in the House as a part of the new Democratic majority in January 2007. During her one full term there, her party's leaders chose to steer clear of issues that might divide liberals from socially conservative party members.

Ford, however, may not have as easy a time on gun issues if he runs for the Senate in New York. In September 2004, for example, he was among 52 Democrats who contributed to the 250-171 vote to repeal the District of Columbia's restrictions on the sale and possession of firearms.



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16 Responses to "NY bombshell: Harold Ford's record isn't all that liberal"

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Gene

JANUARY 15, 2010 AT 2:47 AM



Well I certainly liked him better than Corker, but that's not saying much. He's the last "Blue Dog" that gets my vote. I'll vote for the Republicans next time. As much as I hate them, at least I know what they really are going to do.

And no, I don't hold his family connections against him. We all have "that uncle".

[\(Report comment\)](#)

Jt

JANUARY 14, 2010 AT 12:48 PM



ok. his record and his views are abominable.
(from a native new yorker)

[\(Report comment\)](#)

James Ford

JANUARY 14, 2010 AT 12:22 PM



I would like to shake the family trees of some of these idiots responding to Harold Jr's run for the Senate. Judge the man on his record and leave his family out! New York you decide!

[\(Report comment\)](#)

Algore

JANUARY 14, 2010 AT 12:13 PM



A Ford is a Ford. Harold Ford, Jr. is a likeable guy, but so is any other con man you meet. Shaking with his right hand while taking your wallet with his left.

[\(Report comment\)](#)

Jt

JANUARY 14, 2010 AT 12:05 PM



it is interesting, and depressing, that the tennessean can choose abortion rights and gay marriage as sufficient issues upon which to base their conclusion that harold ford is or is not a "liberal." it is that kind of "thinking" that so distorts the political landscape. harold ford is a hard-core capitalist who supports the trillion-dollar bailouts of the financial institutions which caused the present depression, and he sees no need for them to pay back any of the bailout money. that is the kind of issue which defines his rock-solid conservatism.

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Tom

JANUARY 14, 2010 AT 11:20 AM



Mr. Ford has shown himself to evolve on issues, for example, on LGBT issues. He stated in 2006 that he was against marriage equality for the gay community, however this month he revealed that he's

evolved to support marriage equality after spending time with equality advocates as well as some within the LGBT community. I welcome his epiphany. TN has NO CIVIL UNION laws to help the LGBT community protect themselves when they're in a loving SS relationship. I believe that if Mr. Ford is unsuccessful in his quest to become a NY senator, that he return to TN and educate us on the need for some type of legal protections. For those that are opposed to SS marriage, would you also oppose CIVIL UNIONS? If so, tell us why and on what you can base that decision knowing that a lack of ANY PROTECTIONS have been shown to hurt your fellow American citizens.

(Report comment)

JOE

JANUARY 14, 2010 AT 10:39 AM



HE IS JUST LIKE ALL THE OTHER SELF SERVERS IN POLITICS, WILL DO OR SAY ANYTHING TO GET IN OFFICE, THEN LINE HIS OWN POCKETS OFF THE BACKS OF THE TAX PAYER. PEOPLE IN NEW YORK BETTER BEWARE. SOME OF THE WORST CROOKS IN TENN. CAME FROM HIS FAMILY, SO HE HAS BEEN WELL TRAINED. NEW YORK YOU CAN HAVE HIM AND TAKE CORKER ALSO.

(Report comment)

L RAY SHARER

JANUARY 14, 2010 AT 10:14 AM



What a joke. This man wants to be a senator so bad he do anything or say anything to get elected. Nothing but a carpetbagger who goes to the only state with enough liberals where he can get some votes.

This is just another Hillary Clinton pull the wool over the eyes of the voters.

(Report comment)

Mark Duncan

JANUARY 14, 2010 AT 9:43 AM



Harold Ford in NY? HA! Ya'll can have him. He is the living definition of a politician who will do anything for a vote. He comes from a family noted for some of the most heinous corruption in Tennessee politics. The only reason he's in NY is to look for a bigger payoff from the rich yankees.

(Report comment)

Jerry

JANUARY 14, 2010 AT 8:55 AM



Mr. Ford is a light-skinned African-American with no nego dialect who is very intelligent and articulate. Like many, he is prone to change his mind as he ages and past votes shouldn't be counted against him. He nearly won his race in Tennessee as he talks very plainly and provides details of his views and intended actions without the customary spin associated with politicians. He does have the taint of his family having been convicted of various corruption while serving in political office.

(Report comment)

unclesam328

JANUARY 14, 2010 AT 2:43 AM



Mr. Ford seems to be a upstanding citizen but has a tendency to sway which ever way the wind blows. Yes, he is vote shopping and that does not make a good politician because you have no way to know how he stands. I like a man who stands his grounds and I thought his ground was in Tennessee. He actually stood for more of my issues when he ran in Tennessee. Good luck to you and stay in New York.

(Report comment)

leonard koontz

JANUARY 14, 2010 AT 12:14 AM



Harold Ford is just another political mouth which is only concerned in making a place for himself! he left tennessee to try to find a place where he won't end up in jail like the others in his family. when he speaks better watch both sides of his mouth! WE NEED TERM LIMITS TO GET RID OF PEOPLE IN CONGRESS WHO ONLY SERVE THEMSELVES AND NOT THE PEOPLE AND THE GREAT "UNITED STATES OF AMERICA" these thoughts by a war time vet who has fought for this great country

(Report comment)

Laverne Levites

JANUARY 13, 2010 AT 11:34 PM



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Robin L

JANUARY 13, 2010 AT 10:08 PM



As a resident of Tennessee, I can tell you first hand that I could not tell a difference between Harold Ford and his opponent Bob Corker during their campaign for the Senate. One was a Democrat and one was a Republican. But listening to them speak, I could not tell the difference in substance or policy. Seemed pretty conservative to me!!! Good luck electing him in ny

(Report comment)

Patrick

JANUARY 13, 2010 AT 8:42 PM



Harold Ford will do anything or say anything to get a vote. My hope is that he'll run, get exposed on all of the issues he's voted and commented on, get soundly defeated and ruin any chance of ever getting on the ballot for any office in Tennessee again.

He's an Obama wannabe who is mad that Barack was the first 'man of color' to hold a nationally elected office. He even had Obama on the campaign stump for him in the Tennessee Senate race. Obama almost sounded like a conservative in his praise of Harold and what could be accomplished if they were both elected.

(Report comment)

amy anderson

JANUARY 13, 2010 AT 8:37 PM



Ford is a politician. In Tennessee, he voted the way which he thought would get him elected. He will do the same in NY. Politicians have no ideals and could care less what goes on. They love power and money, not necessarily in that order. They will do/say/vote in such a way as to continue having power and money for as long as possible. The very idea of any of them doing anything in anyone's best interests except for themselves and the their campaign contributors is ludicrous.

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