

RICHARD WOODS - WATAUGA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSION DISTRICT 1
(R)

<u>POTENTIAL HITS FROM THE LEFT</u>	<u>POTENTIAL HITS FROM THE RIGHT</u>
• Supported redistricting partly due to student influence in local elections • Opposed a voter referendum on the county election method • Supported “diminishing the student population” without a public plan • Financially supported Mark Robinson • Watauga GOP vice chair during the party's public support for Mark Robinson	• First-time candidate with no elected record

Key Findings Include:

- **Woods Supported Redistricting That Changed How Watauga County Elects Commissioners.** Woods publicly supported Senate Bill 759, which replaced Watauga County's at-large commissioner elections with five single-member districts. He said he supported the legislation because of "the influence the university's student population had on the local election" and has advocated for keeping the current district map in place.
- **Woods Questioned The Long-Term Electoral Influence Of Appalachian State Students.** At a February 2026 candidate forum, Woods told Appalachian State students that many would not remain in Boone by the end of the next commissioner term and encouraged them to "vote like you're going to be living here in four years." During the same forum, he also stated that he supports "diminishing the student population," though he acknowledged he did not have a publicly available plan to accomplish that objective.
- **Woods Serves In Republican Party Leadership Roles In Watauga County.** Woods currently serves as Vice Chairman of the Watauga County Republican Party and Treasurer of North Carolina's 5th Congressional District Republican Party. He is also a first-time candidate for elected office.
- **Woods Has Maintained A Limited Public Policy Profile Outside Of Election Administration.** Research identified few publicly stated positions on issues such as taxes, healthcare, economic development, housing, infrastructure, or education. No campaign website or comprehensive policy platform was identified, with most publicly available statements focusing on election administration and local governance.
- **Woods Financially Supported Mark Robinson's 2024 Gubernatorial Campaign.** Woods contributed to Mark Robinson's campaign for governor during the 2024 election cycle. Robinson faced widespread criticism throughout his campaign over past statements about LGBTQ people, women, Jewish people, and Holocaust-related issues. The

Watauga County Republican Party, where Woods serves as Vice Chairman, also publicly backed Robinson's candidacy.

Jurisdiction Summary

Politically, Watauga County is considered Democratic-leaning at the federal level, although it is more competitive than many other counties in western North Carolina. The presence of Appalachian State University and its student population has contributed to Democratic strength in Boone and surrounding precincts, while more rural areas of the county tend to vote Republican. In recent presidential elections, Joe Biden carried Watauga County in 2020, Kamala Harris carried the county in 2024, and Hillary Clinton carried it in 2016, making Watauga one of the few western North Carolina counties to consistently support Democratic presidential nominees despite the region's broader Republican trend. The county remains politically divided on local issues, with debates over growth, housing, student influence, and development frequently shaping local elections.

Politically, Watauga has a competitive local landscape with both Republican and Democratic representation on the county commission and state legislative seats; the county leans slightly Republican in local contests but with significant Democratic engagement driven by university influences and localized issues. The county has experienced recent electoral changes such as transitioning from at-large to single-member commissioner districts, enacted via state legislation, to improve representation across distinct communities within the county.

The Board Of Commissioners, a policy-making body deriving its authority pursuant to the N.C. General Statutes, levies taxes, develops a budget and directs the fiscal policy of the county under the provisions of the local Government Budget and Fiscal Control Act.

Richard Woods (Richard Lee “Rick” Woods) is the Republican candidate for Watauga County Board of Commissioners District 1 in the 2026 election cycle. According to the official Watauga BOE candidate list, he filed as a Republican candidate for the District 1 seat. He does not have a Republican opponent and is facing Democrat Adam Hege.

BACKGROUND

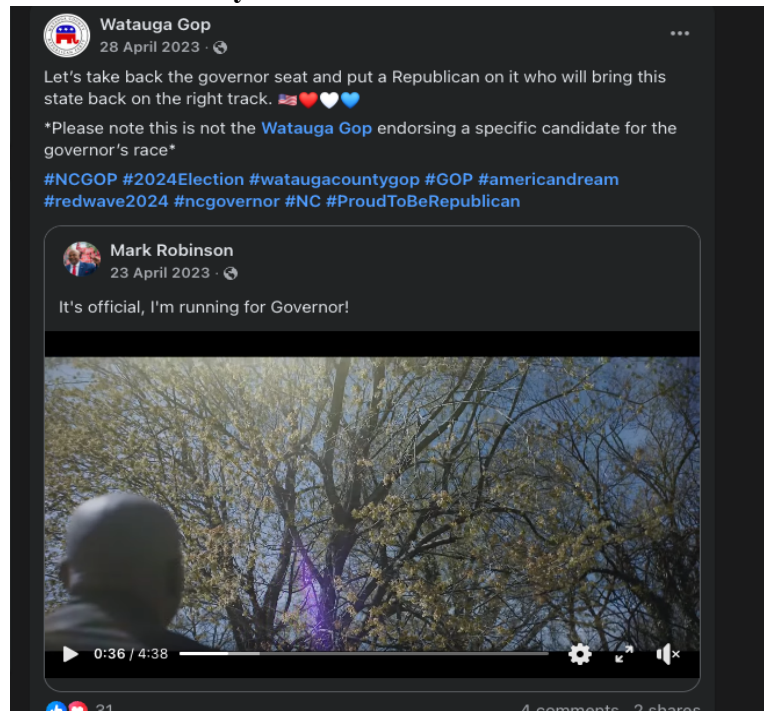
Woods Is A GOP Leader Serving As Vice Chairman Of The Watauga County Republican Party And Treasurer Of The North Carolina’s District 5 GOP. [[Watauga County Republican Party](#), accessed, 7/1/2026].

FEC Records Listed Woods Occupation As “Self-Employed Anesthesiologist.” [[FEC](#), accessed, 7/1/2026]

AFFILIATION WITH POLITICAL FIGURES/ORGANIZATIONS:

Woods Was A Board Member For Back Our Blue, A Local Non-Profit To Support Local Law Enforcement. [[HC Press](#), 1/4/2023].

The Watauga GOP Facebook Group Supported A Mark Robinson Post For Governor But Did Not Officially Endorse Him.



[Facebook, Watauga GOP, 4/28/2023]

Mark Robinson Was Described By Mainstream North Carolina Outlets As An Extremist Because Of Past Comments On LGBTQ People, Women, and Holocaust-Related Issues.

Mark Robinson Said “He Feels Sick When He Sees A Church Flying A Rainbow Pride Flag.” *“Washington —* When Mark Robinson, the lieutenant governor of North Carolina, took the podium earlier this month after winning the Republican nomination for governor, he pledged not to allow his campaign to be dragged "into the mud." But in the two weeks since the primary, inflammatory remarks he's made on a range of topics have been rapidly resurfacing, flagged by reporters and opponents. Robinson's inflammatory comments have spanned a number of topics, but he's been especially vocal on LGBTQ+ issues. At a church service last year, Robinson said he feels ‘sick’ when he sees a church flying a rainbow pride flag, which he called ‘a direct spit in the face of God almighty.’ He's said that there's no reason that children should be taught about ‘transgenderism, homosexuality — any of that filth.’ He also said that ‘if there's a movement in this country that is demonic and that is full of the spirit of antichrist, it is the transgender movement.’ And he's claimed that "we have pushed homosexuality over the top," predicting in a Facebook post, "Mark my words PEDOPHILLA is next, which will be closely followed by the END of civilians. Mark Robinson, lieutenant governor of North Carolina, speaks during a ‘Get Out The Vote’ rally with former President Donald Trump in Greensboro, North Carolina, on March 2, 2024.” [[CBS News](#), 3/19/2024]

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Mark Robinson Said Radical Muslims “Like Cuttin Folks Into Pieces.” “He has also made multiple derogatory comments about Islam, among them, expressing disappointment that religious freedom applies to Muslims and claiming that ‘Radical’ Muslims ‘like cuttin’ folks into pieces.’ Robinson, a 55-year-old who formerly worked in furniture manufacturing, has served as North Carolina's lieutenant governor since 2021. A pro-gun rights speech he made five years ago at a city council meeting went viral online and helped kickstart his political career.” [[CBS News](#), 3/19/2024]

2020: Mark Robinson Said He Wanted “To Go Back To America Where Women Couldn’t Vote.” “Before he was elected, he'd made many inflammatory comments in posts on social media. And since then, he's used similar rhetoric during appearances at church services or at political events. One quote that attracted attention in recent days has appeared to be taken out of context, though. During a 2020 event, Robinson said he wants "to go back to the America where women couldn't vote," but that appeared to be a response to a question about whether he would prefer to go back to that time or a time when "Black people were swinging from cheap trees." He answered that he would prefer the former, clarifying that at the time, Republicans "fought for real social change." But Robinson has made plenty of other controversial remarks elsewhere. The lieutenant governor has suggested that feminism was created by the devil and equated it to racism. He's also said "it's not your body anymore," fiercely opposing women seeking abortion. He has acknowledged paying for an abortion for his wife before they were married more than 30 years ago, noting it was the "wrong" decision. He's called climate change research ‘junk science.’” [[CBS News](#), 3/19/2024]

As Lieutenant Governor Mark Robinson Quoted Hitler. “As lieutenant governor, however, Robinson last September praised ‘the heroes who ran towards danger, the lives tragically cut short, and the stories of unity that emerged from the rubble.’ He's also quoted Hitler, without context.” [[CBS News](#), 3/19/2024]

PARTISAN POSTS

No findings of note

ENDORSEMENTS

No findings of note

CAMPAIGN FINANCE

No findings of note

PERSONAL POLITICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

2012-2025: Woods Contributed \$9,000 To The North Carolina Republican Party. [[FEC](#), accessed, 7/1/2026]

2007-2022: Woods Contributed Over \$8,000 To Various Republican State Candidates. [[Rick Woods NC Donations](#), accessed, 7/1/2026]

2012: Woods Contributed \$135 To Pat McCrory. [[Rick Woods NC Donations](#), accessed, 7/1/2026]

2023: Woods Contributed \$100 To Mark Robinson. [[Rick Woods NC Donations](#), accessed, 7/1/2026]

2015: Woods Contributed \$150 To Dan Forest. [[Rick Woods NC Donations](#), accessed, 7/1/2026]

Controversial Contributions

1. **Friends of Mark Robinson — major extremism/scandal baggage.** Mark Robinson was broadly described by mainstream North Carolina outlets as an extremist because of past comments on LGBTQ people, women, Jews, and Holocaust-related issues [[the Assembly](#), 3/13/2026], and his 2024 campaign was rocked by allegations that he made racist and sexually explicit posts on a pornographic website; the fallout included public pressure from fellow Republicans and resignations in his orbit [WRAL News, [3/13/2026](#)].
2. **Pat McCrory Committee — HB2 / “bathroom bill.”** McCrory’s defining controversy remains HB2, the 2016 anti-trans “bathroom bill,” which triggered national backlash and major economic consequences for North Carolina. AP calculated the law would cost the state more than \$3.7 billion over a dozen years [PBS, [3/13/2026](#)], and McCrory’s handling of HB2 became a core liability at the end of his governorship.
3. **Committee to Elect Dan Forest — COVID extremism / anti-mask posture.** Forest’s 2020 gubernatorial run and allied committee are tied to his aggressive opposition to COVID public-health restrictions. He sued Gov. Roy Cooper over shutdown orders, lost key rulings [WRAL, [3/13/2026](#)], and publicly aligned himself with anti-mask politics during the pandemic [Indy Week, [3/13/2026](#)], which became a notable statewide controversy.

ISSUES

Taxes / Controversial Budget Cuts

No findings of note

Good Government/Ethics

No findings of note

Public Safety

No findings of note

Healthcare

No findings of note

Economic development

No findings of note

Housing & Development (affordable housing, zoning, data centers)

No findings of note

Environment / Land Management

No findings of note

Infrastructure (roads, parks, water and utilities, bike paths)

No findings of note

Education

No findings of note

Elections/Voting Access

February 2026: During App State College Republicans “Meet The Candidate” Forum, Woods Told The Students That Their Votes Do Not Affect The Outcome Because They Will Not Remain In Boone. “Woods is a supporter of diminishing the student population and keeping the current voting map as is, though he said he does not have a plan currently available to the public. District One is heavily populated by App State students, whose vote he intends to reach through his work with CRS. ‘Most of you won’t even be here in Boone in four years when the term ends with this current race, so what does it affect how you vote? It doesn’t,’ Woods said. ‘Vote like you’re going to be living here in four years.’” [[The Appalachian](#), 2/28/2026]

November 2025: Woods Spoke In Favor Of Senate Bill 759 And Argued It Would Produce “More Accurate Representation.” “Rick Woods, a resident of Watauga County, spoke in support of Senate Bill 759, stating that it only changes the method of electing County Commissioners to allow residents in each district to vote for a candidate to represent their district, providing more accurate representation. He noted that he is among the voters considered disenfranchised and will be eligible to vote again in 2026. In response to concerns about money spent on the related lawsuit, Mr. Woods stated that Democrats previously paid \$35,000 to hire a lawyer from Asheville to challenge the bill. He added that the language of the referendum was unclear before his time expired.” [[Watauga County Board of Commissioners](#), Meeting Minutes, 11/4/2025]

Woods Said That He Had Previously Been Disenfranchised By At-Large Elections But Would Be Eligible To Vote Under A New System. “Rick Woods, a resident of Watauga County, spoke in support of Senate Bill 759, stating that it only changes the method of electing County Commissioners to allow residents in each district to vote for a candidate to represent their district, providing more accurate representation. He noted that he is among the voters considered disenfranchised and will be eligible to vote again in 2026. In response to concerns about money spent on the related lawsuit, Mr. Woods stated that Democrats previously paid \$35,000 to hire a lawyer from Asheville to challenge the bill. He added that the language of the referendum was unclear before his time expired.” [[Watauga County Board of Commissioners](#), Meeting Minutes, 11/4/2025]

Senate Bill 759 Replaced Watauga County’s At-Large Election System With Five Single Member Commission Districts.

Section 1 – Watauga County Board of Commissioners:

CURRENT LAW: The Watauga County Board of Commissioners consists of five members, elected at-large on a partisan basis. Members serve staggered terms, with elections held in even-numbered years at the time of the general election for county officers. Every two years, three of the five commissioners are up for election. The candidate receiving the lowest number of votes is elected to serve a two-year term and the remaining members are elected to serve four-year terms.

BILL ANALYSIS: Section 1 would establish five single-member electoral districts for the Watauga County Board of Commissioners. One member from each district would be elected and each member would be required to reside in the district from which they are elected. Members would be elected by the qualified voters residing in that district to serve staggered four-year terms.

In order to implement the staggering of terms, in 2024 and every four years after, the members elected from Districts 3, 4, and 5 would serve a four-year term. In 2026 and every four years after, the members elected from Districts 1 and 2 would serve a four-year term.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Effective when it becomes law and applies to elections occurring on or after that date.

[[North Carolina General Assembly](#), 10/23/2026]

Affordability / Cost of Living

No findings of note

Ideology, Rhetoric & Extremism Signals

Watauga GOP Posted That Border Was Not Under Control Under The Biden Administration.



[[Facebook](#), Accessed 3/13/26]

Social Media Links:

No findings of note