



Making History

The Honorable
Heather Wilson, '82,
runs for U.S. Senate

By Crystal Ross

Heather Wilson is a recipient of the 2009 Distinguished Graduate Award from the Air Force Academy and the AOG. She is also the first Air Force Academy graduate to be elected to Congress, and is now seeking to make history again as the first U.S. Senator to come from USAFA. Wilson, a Republican from Albuquerque, N.M., was surprised to learn that no other Academy graduate has been elected to either national legislative chamber. The veteran politician explained that sometimes graduates don't want to get involved in politics, which is the right thing when they're serving on active duty. But she said veterans should continue to better their country.

"There's an obligation to serve even when we hang up the uniform," Wilson said. The Class of 1982 graduate says a gap exists between military and civilian society and that there are now fewer veterans who serve in public office.

"Young people today often have no one in their families who have served, no one who even had to think about it," she said, pointing out that the U.S. military draft was over in 1973. "There's a gap between the protectors and the protected."

Wilson was interested in public service before she ever enrolled at the Academy. Her grandfather was a pilot in World War I, and her father was an Air Force pilot. In her family, she says, service and a commitment to the community were expected. Government is not a spectator sport," she recalled.

Wilson said attending the Academy taught her integrity and how to lead and fostered her belief in a commitment to public service. The honor code especially stuck with her. "The Academy is a life-changing experience for most folks, including me," she said.

Wilson represented New Mexico's first congressional district from 1998 to 2009. She was the first New Mexico woman to represent the state since

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the 1940s. Instead of running for re-election to the House in 2008, she ran for Senate, finishing second in the Republican primary for a seat that eventually went to a Democrat.

While a member of the House, Wilson served on the Committee on Energy and Commerce, including various subcommittees on the environment, health, telecommunications and the internet, as well as on the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. She was the ranking member on the Subcommittee on Technical and Tactical Intelligence and served on the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations. Wilson said she believes her most important work was on the intelligence committee after the 9/11 attacks.

If elected to the Senate, Wilson expects her focus to be financial management and national security. She said she decided to run because of what she's seen happening to the country over the last few years. "First and foremost, we must get our finances in order. The debt and over regulation of private industry has led to a slow economy and slow job growth," she said. She added that it is also important to steward the nation's security even in times of peace.

Wilson said she doesn't expect to see a behavioral change in politics any time soon. "The system wasn't set up to be efficient. It was set up to protect us from tyranny. I don't expect to see an end to party bickering."

She explained that opinions are bound to collide when there is an exchange of ideas happening out in the open, as the U.S. political system is set up to work. But Wilson said she works more behind the scenes and focuses on getting things done. "I'm a work horse, not a show horse."

In the late 1970's, Wilson was in the third USAFA class to admit women. As a cadet she served as Vice Wing Commander and commander of basic cadet training. After graduation, Wilson earned a Rhodes Scholarship and received both master's and doctoral degrees in international relations from Oxford University. As an Air Force officer, she planned the bed down of cruise missiles in the United Kingdom and served as the U.S. Mission to NATO in Belgium. After leaving active duty she became the Director for Defense Policy and Arms Control on the National Security Council staff at the White House. In that capacity Wilson advised President Reagan and his national security advisor on U.S.-NATO relations during the era in which the Berlin Wall came down and the Warsaw Pact collapsed.

Heather Wilson now lives in Albuquerque with her husband, Jay Hone, a retired Air Force colonel who previously taught law at USAFA. They have three children. 📌

GIVING BACK

Grads in Public Service

Recently, the AOG ran a survey on graduates who have served or are serving in public office. The results show that Air Force Academy leadership extends well beyond service to the military. We received a colorful cross-section of graduates who have been giving back to their communities for many years.

Greg Anders | Class of 1985

Currently running for Second Congressional District, Washington.

Patrick "Kit" Bobko | Class of 1991

Present city council member and former mayor, City of Hermosa Beach, California.

Chris Calvert | Class of 1970

Represents Santa Fe City Council, District 1. Sanata Fe, New Mexico. 2006-2014.

Dr. Dave Hannan | Class of 1973

Trustee on the Newark Village Board, New York. 1989-1997.
Wayne County Coroner, New York. 1992-Present.

James O. Icenhour Jr. | Class of 1967

Airline Pilots Association Second Officer Representative for Council 66 in New York, 1993-1998. Secretary/Treasurer of the Delta Master Executive Council of the Air Line Pilots Association, 1998-2005. Board of Supervisors, James City County, Virginia. 2005-2013.

Ray Powell | Class of 1983

Town of Monument, CO. Board of Trustees (Town Council). 1995-1998.

Charles Reed | Class of 1970

Mayor, San Jose, CA.

Bob Smith | Class of 1983

Current member, Board of Directors, Indian Creek School Board, Wintersville, Ohio.

Robert E. Smith | Class of 1961

Director to East Kern Health Care District, California City, California. 1980-2014.

Scott Souza | Class of 1998

Presently Vice President of the Paralyzed Veterans of America (Bay Area & Western Chapter), California.