

MEET CONGRESSWOMAN FEDERICA WILSON

A Voice for the Voiceless

Throughout her life, Congresswoman Frederica Wilson has been a voice for the voiceless.

As an elementary school principal, she stood up for the health of her students by opposing the construction of an environmentally dangerous waste facility being built across the street from her school. She won the fight, forcing the Miami-Dade County Commission to close the plant.

As a community leader, she stood up for the fair treatment of Haitian women refugees who were incarcerated with no privacy in a local detention center. In 1984, she tirelessly and successfully lobbied Congress for their release. To this day, she remains close friends with all of them.

Her lifelong desire for standing up for our most vulnerable populations is rooted in her faith, family, and passion for public service.

A Lifetime of Service

Frederica S. Wilson was born on November 5, 1942 in Miami's Overtown community, but was raised in nearby Liberty City. The daughter of Beulah Finley and Thirlee Smith, a small business owner and local civil rights activist, she learned the value of community activism from a young age. Her parents always taught her to care for the downtrodden and to share with the less fortunate and were one of the first African American homeowners in Miami-Dade County. Her brother, the late Thirlee Smith, Jr., rose to become the first full-time African American reporter at the Miami Herald.

Wilson earned her Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education from Fisk University in 1963 and her Master of Science in Elementary Education from the University of Miami in 1972. She served as a teacher and as assistant educational coordinator for Head Start in Miami. For a short time, she left the working world to raise her three children, but the calling of education proved too strong. She returned to serve as the assistant principal of Skyway Elementary School, later becoming the school's principal. In 1992, the school was honored by Secretary of Education Lamar Alexander as part of President George H.W. Bush's "America 2000" plan to upgrade national education standards. From 1992 to 1998, she served on the Miami-Dade County School Board, where she helped introduce an African American history component into the teaching curriculum.

In 1998, Wilson successfully ran for a seat in the Florida State House of Representatives, where she served as Minority Whip for four years until 2002. From 2002 to 2010, she served in the Florida State Senate, where she served as Minority Leader Pro Tempore and as Minority Lead Whip. She soon became known as the "Conscience of the Senate" for her willingness to tackle historically ignored issues. Her achievements include working with Republican Governor Jeb Bush to remove the Confederate flag from the State Capitol, mandating HIV/AIDS testing for

newly-released prisoners, opposing high-stakes standardized testing , pushing for a ban of the term “illegal alien” in state public records, and partnering with Republican Governor Charlie Crist to restore voting rights for ex-felons. Wilson has a long history of working with her colleagues across the aisle to pass bipartisan legislation.

Wilson has been heralded by such diverse groups as the Florida Association of Women Lawyers, the American Cancer Society, Florida Cable Telecommunications Association, NAACP, and her sorority Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., where she served as the Director of the South Atlantic Region for four years and as Director of AKA Connections, the political action arm, for six years. She is also a 25 year member of the prestigious LINKS, Inc.

In 2010, Wilson emerged from a competitive nine person primary to win election overwhelmingly to represent the 17th District of Florida in the United States House of Representatives. The 17th District includes Northern Miami-Dade and Southeast Broward Counties.

Making a Difference for our Children

Frederica Wilson remains an educator and principal at heart. She strongly believes we must rededicate ourselves to our children through a renewed focused on education. It is her deep belief in the promise and potential of our youth that motivates her each and every day.

As a School Board member, Wilson saw the necessity for a program to intervene in the lives of at-risk male youth at an early age. To this end, she founded the 5000 Role Models of Excellence Project, which has grown into a national model for dropout prevention programs. The program, run through the Miami-Dade Public Schools system, has awarded more than \$5 million in scholarships to minority boys since its creation in 1992 and helped thousands of young men turn their lives around. The program currently operates in over 110 Miami-Dade County public schools, serving more than 6000 youth. Wilson also established a Role Models chapter in the Pinellas County School District. In 1997, the program was honored with the Teaching Example for the Nation Award by President Bill Clinton at the Summit for America’s Future in Philadelphia, PA.

A Pillar of the Community

Frederica Wilson remains an influential force for the South Florida community. At her consecration ceremony at the Historic St. Agnes’ Episcopal Church in January 2011, more than 2,000 members of the community attended to bless the beginning of her time in federal office.

In Congress, she serves on the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, where she is focused on America’s role on the global stage, particularly in Haiti and the Caribbean. As a member of the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, she is committed to bringing jobs back to our communities and increasing STEM (Science, Technology, Energy, and Math) funding for our schools.

Frederica Wilson understands that as long as individuals and families find themselves staring at record unemployment, home foreclosures and business failures, our country cannot get back on track. Providing for those who cannot care for themselves is not just an obligation, but a strategy to get our economy on sound footing.

Wilson is widowed and is the proud mother of three children, Nicole, Kesha, and Paul, and five beautiful grandchildren.