



SCHOLARSHIP IN HONOR OF

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Dr. Heather Wilson

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U.S. AIR FORCE

# Dr. Heather Wilson

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**D**r. Heather Wilson has more than 40 years of exemplary professional experience in a range of leadership roles in the military, higher education, government, and private industry. She has been a living example of all the best values the Academy nurtures and our democratic institutions seek in our leaders. Moreover, she has been a trailblazer and an inspiration for young people following in her path, and perhaps especially young women.

Dr. Wilson was born on December 30, 1960, in Keene, New Hampshire. She grew up around aviation and had hoped to become a pilot like her father and grandfather before her. Her paternal grandparents were born in Scotland. Her grandfather, George Gordon “Scotty” Wilson, flew for the Royal Air Force in World War I and immigrated to America in 1922. Her father started flying at age 13 and enlisted in the United States Air Force after high school. Dr. Wilson is now an instrument-rated private pilot herself.

The United States Air Force Academy began admitting women during Dr. Wilson’s junior year at Keene High School. She applied and was appointed to the Academy and became the first person in her family to go to college.

She graduated from the Air Force Academy in the third class to include women. At the Academy, she was the first woman to command basic training and the first woman Vice Wing Commander. After graduation, she went on to earn her master’s and doctoral degrees as the Academy’s second female Rhodes scholar at Oxford University in England, where she was also a collegiate rower.

Dr. Wilson was an Air Force officer from 1982 to 1989. As an Air Force officer, she was a negotiator and political advisor to the U.S. Air Force in the United Kingdom and a defense planning officer for NATO in Belgium, where her work included arms control negotiations.

From 1989 to 1991, Dr. Wilson served on the National Security Council staff as Director for Defense Policy and Arms Control for President George H.W. Bush during the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Warsaw Pact.

From 1991 to 1995, and again from 2009 to 2013, Dr. Wilson was in the private sector. In 1991 she founded Keystone International, Inc., a company that worked for the defense and scientific industry. She served as a senior advisor to several national laboratories on matters related to nuclear weapons, non-proliferation, arms control verification, intelligence and the defense industrial base.

From 1995 to 1998, Dr. Wilson was a cabinet secretary in New Mexico’s state government responsible for foster care, adoption, juvenile delinquency, children’s mental health and early childhood education.

From 1998 to 2009, Dr. Wilson was a member of the U.S. House of Representatives.

In the House, Dr. Wilson served on the powerful Energy and Commerce Committee, as well as the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence where she helped shape national security policy in the years following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001.

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She also spearheaded new consumer protections, as more and more Americans conducted business online, and passed additional regulations for wireless communications as cell phones grew in popularity. Back home, Wilson also passed a number of bills preserving New Mexico's cultural heritage.

Dr. Wilson was only the second woman to represent New Mexico in Congress when she was elected. She was also the first female military veteran elected to a full term in Congress.

From 2013 to 2017, Wilson served as president of the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology, leaving to accept the appointment as Secretary of the Air Force. She would become the first Air Force Academy graduate to serve as the Secretary, yet another first in her journey.

At her swearing-in ceremony, Secretary of Defense James Mattis said, "You know, I read Oxford University books. Secretary Wilson writes them," Mattis said to laughs from the audience. "Madam Secretary, I say unequivocally, I need your ideas and this department needs your wisdom."

From 2017 to 2019, Dr. Wilson served as the 24th Secretary of the Air Force and was responsible for the affairs of the Department of the Air Force, including the organizing, training and equipping, and providing for the welfare of 660,000 Active Duty, Guard, Reserve and civilian forces and their families. She provided oversight of the Air Force's annual budget of more than \$132 billion and directed strategy and policy development, risk management, weapons acquisition, technology investments and human resource management across a global enterprise.

In 2019, Dr. Wilson submitted a letter of resignation to accept appointment as the president of The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP). She released a statement in which she said it was a privilege to serve as the Secretary alongside U.S. airmen over the two previous years. "I very much appreciate the opportunity to have served," she wrote. "I remain a strong advocate for our nation's defense and an Airman for life."

She further said she was "proud of the progress we have made to restore our nation's defense. We have improved the readiness of the force; we have cut years out of acquisition schedules and gotten better prices through competition; we have repealed hundreds of superfluous regulations; and we have strengthened our ability to deter and dominate in space," she said.

Dr. Wilson then formally accepted the appointment to become president of The University of Texas at El Paso. In announcing her appointment, the university said that, "Dr. Wilson's broad experience in the highest levels of university leadership, and state and national government...will help ensure that UTEP continues its remarkable trajectory as a nationally recognized public research institution." Dr. Wilson is now gracing UTEP with the same leadership and professional values she has shown throughout her productive and exemplary career.

We are proud to celebrate Dr. Heather Wilson as one of our Falcon Foundation Honorees as "an Airman for life" and an example to all who follow in her path.

As of the spring of 2023, she and her husband, Jay Hone, have three adult children and one granddaughter.

## SCHOLARSHIP IN HONOR OF DR. HEATHER WILSON

Dear General Lorenz:

Dr. Heather Wilson exemplifies the values the Academy nurtures and is an example for all who aspire to serve our nation. She has served her country at many levels of the military, higher education, government, and private industry. She has set examples of excellence at every level, and she was the first Air Force Academy graduate to serve as Secretary of the Air Force.

It is our pleasure to establish this scholarship in perpetuity to honor Heather Wilson, and to celebrate her example for young people following in her footsteps, perhaps especially young women.

Sincerely,

Fred M. Williams  
LtCol (USAF Ret)

Patricia L. Williams



The Falcon Foundation is a 501(c)(3), non-profit foundation. Its purpose is to provide scholarships to College or Preparatory Schools for motivated young people seeking admission to USAFA and a career in the Air Force.

Although it is a separate organization, the Falcon Foundation works closely with USAFA.