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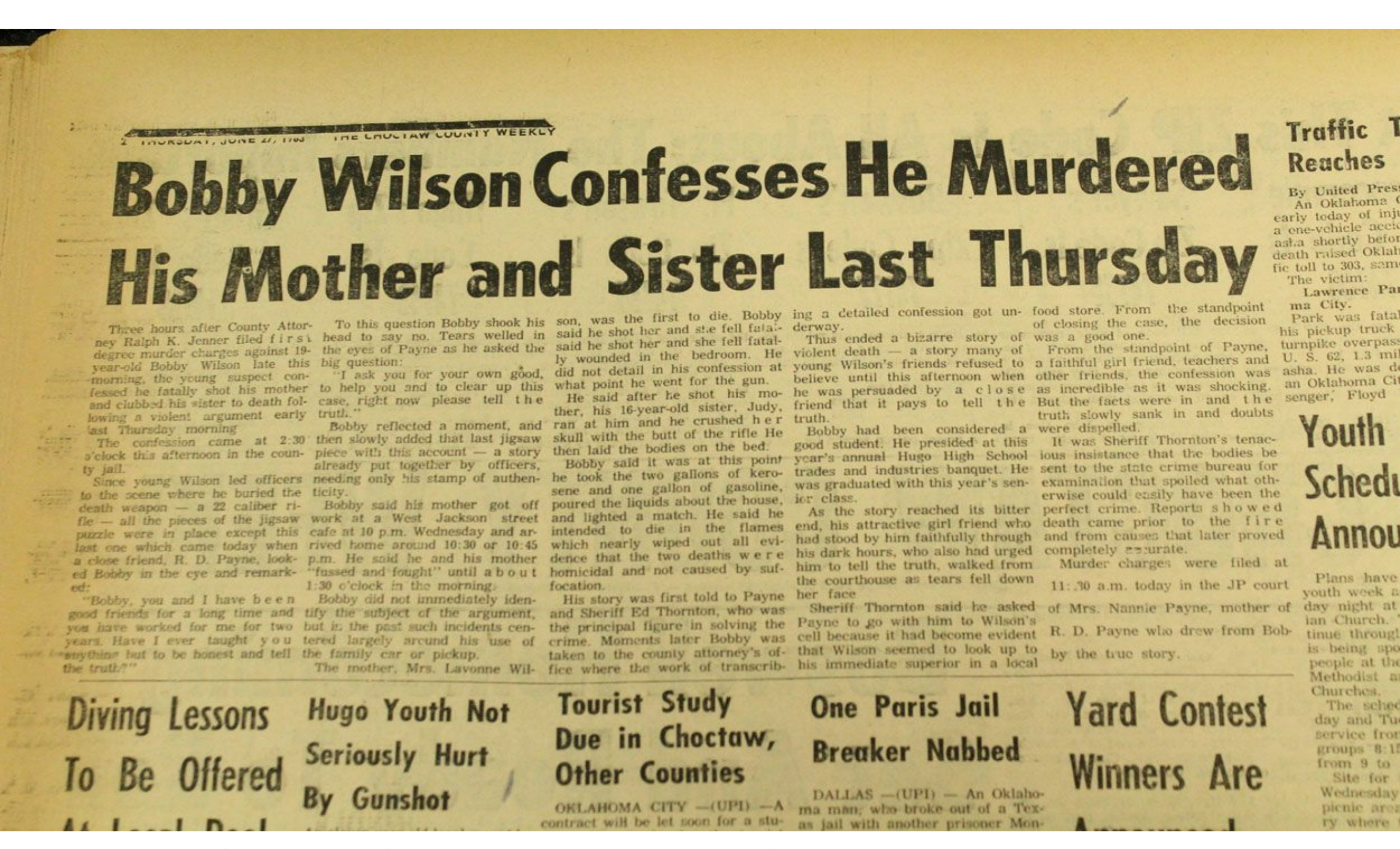
Arizona Senate candidate who killed his mother supports 'good guys' with guns

ALISON STEINBACH | ARIZONA REPUBLIC | 3:18 pm MST July 16, 2018



2 THURSDAY, JUNE 27, 1963 THE CHOCTAW COUNTY WEEKLY

Bobby Wilson Confesses He Murdered His Mother and Sister Last Thursday

Three hours after County Attorney Ralph K. Jenner filed first degree murder charges against 19-year-old Bobby Wilson late this morning, the young suspect confessed he fatally shot his mother and clubbed his sister to death following a violent argument early last Thursday morning.

The confession came at 2:30 o'clock this afternoon in the county jail.

Since young Wilson led officers to the scene where he buried the death weapon — a 22 caliber rifle — all the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle were in place except this last one which came today when a close friend, R. D. Payne, looked Bobby in the eye and remarked:

"Bobby, you and I have been good friends for a long time and you have worked for me for two years. Have I ever taught you anything but to be honest and tell the truth?"

To this question Bobby shook his head to say no. Tears welled in the eyes of Payne as he asked the big question:

"I ask you for your own good, to help you and to clear up this case, right now please tell the truth."

Bobby reflected a moment, and then slowly added that last jigsaw piece with this account — a story already put together by officers, needing only his stamp of authenticity.

Bobby said his mother got off work at a West Jackson street cafe at 10 p.m. Wednesday and arrived home around 10:30 or 10:45 p.m. He said he and his mother "fussed and fought" until about 1:30 o'clock in the morning.

Bobby did not immediately identify the subject of the argument, but in the past such incidents centered largely around his use of the family car or pickup.

The mother, Mrs. Lavonne Wilson, was the first to die. Bobby said he shot her and she fell fatal- said he shot her and she fell fatally wounded in the bedroom. He did not detail in his confession at what point he went for the gun.

He said after he shot his mother, his 16-year-old sister, Judy, ran at him and he crushed her skull with the butt of the rifle He then laid the bodies on the bed.

Bobby said it was at this point he took the two gallons of kerosene and one gallon of gasoline, poured the liquids about the house, and lighted a match. He said he intended to die in the flames which nearly wiped out all evidence that the two deaths were homicidal and not caused by suffocation.

His story was first told to Payne and Sheriff Ed Thornton, who was the principal figure in solving the crime. Moments later Bobby was taken to the county attorney's office where the work of transcribing a detailed confession got underway.

Thus ended a bizarre story of violent death — a story many of young Wilson's friends refused to believe until this afternoon when he was persuaded by a close friend that it pays to tell the truth.

Bobby had been considered a good student. He presided at this year's annual Hugo High School trades and industries banquet. He was graduated with this year's senior class.

As the story reached its bitter end, his attractive girl friend who had stood by him faithfully through his dark hours, who also had urged him to tell the truth, walked from the courthouse as tears fell down her face.

Sheriff Thornton said he asked Payne to go with him to Wilson's cell because it had become evident that Wilson seemed to look up to his immediate superior in a local food store. From the standpoint of closing the case, the decision was a good one.

From the standpoint of Payne, a faithful girl friend, teachers and other friends, the confession was as incredible as it was shocking. But the facts were in and the truth slowly sank in and doubts were dispelled.

It was Sheriff Thornton's tenacious insistence that the bodies be sent to the state crime bureau for examination that spoiled what otherwise could easily have been the perfect crime. Reports showed death came prior to the fire and from causes that later proved completely accurate.

Murder charges were filed at 11:30 a.m. today in the JP court of Mrs. Nannie Payne, mother of R. D. Payne who drew from Bobby the true story.

Diving Lessons To Be Offered

Hugo Youth Not Seriously Hurt By Gunshot

One Paris Jail Breaker Nabbed

DALLAS —(UPI) — An Oklahoma man, who broke out of a Texas jail with another prisoner Mon-

Yard Contest Winners Are

Bobby Wilson, a candidate for the Arizona Senate from Tucson, surprised the audience at a gun-control forum last week.
WILLIAM FLANNIGAN, AZCENTRAL

A big crowd gathered in a Tucson church last week, ready to hear candidates' plans for **gun-control legislation from people vying to become lawmakers** at the Arizona state Capitol.

All was going more or less as expected. Then, it was Bobby Wilson's turn to speak.

Bobby Wilson, state Senate candidate in Legislative District 2.
COURTESY OF BOBBY WILSON

Wilson, one of two Republican candidates who attended the July 9 meeting, took the mic and told a story of how he shot and killed a crazed attacker in an act of self-defense while a teenager.

That attacker, it turned out, was his mother.

He said his life story illustrates the importance of having "a good guy there with a gun" rather than gun-control legislation.

"You can pass all the laws you want to in this world, and when you've got somebody out there that wants to harm somebody, they're going to do it if you don't stop them," Wilson told the crowd.

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The audience was shocked, as video posted online showed. The crowd, brought together by Moms Demand Action, a nationwide movement against gun violence, burst into boos and heckles.

But there is more to Wilson's story — a lot more.

The tale begins in Hugo, Oklahoma, in 1963, when Wilson was 18 years old. It includes charges of familial murder, a home destroyed by fire, years of amnesia and the start of a winding path that led a young man to a legal career and, now, ambitions to serve in the Arizona Legislature.

The candidate told only part of this story to the Tucson audience.

"(She) was hell-bent on killing me in my sleep one night. At three o'clock in the morning, I woke up to find a rifle in my face — a semiautomatic rifle at that — and the bullets started to fly, and I started diving for cover," Wilson said.

A clip of Wilson's remarks was posted on Twitter by a reporter with the Tucson-based *Arizona Daily Star*.

He said he dodged six bullets before reaching for the gun under his bed, which he then used to shoot his mother. He said if not for that gun, he'd be dead.

Both his 49-year-old mother and 17-year-old sister died that night, as Wilson recalled in a **2010 memoir about the event**. The book, "Bobby's Trials," was published by Apache Publishing Company, a small Arizona-based publisher operated by Wilson's wife. The publisher has printed **four other books** by Wilson.

In his memoir, Wilson wrote that his mother suffered from debilitating depression and fits of intense rage. He also called her "deranged" and a "fugitive hiding in the backwoods of S.E. Oklahoma."

More: More than 500 guns found, seized from convicted felon in California

Court records and newspaper articles from the time suggest there may be more to the story than Wilson's account.

Those records show he was charged with the murder of his mother and sister, and soon after his arrest he confessed to those charges. He later recanted his confession and claimed he had amnesia about the events of the night in question.

The charges against him ultimately were dismissed by an Oklahoma judge.

What happened the night of the killing?

Bobby Wilson, age 18, one week before the house explosion in 1963. He said he has no family or earlier photos because everything burned in the fire (a coworker had this one of him).
COURTESY OF BOBBY WILSON

In an interview with *The Arizona Republic*, Wilson recalled more of his memories of the events that night at his childhood home.

Wilson said his mother, Lavonne Wilson, entered his room and repeatedly shot at him but missed.

While aiming for Wilson, he said his mother must have seen a shadow move, so she swung the gun. The rifle butt hit his younger sister, Judy Wilson, in the back of the head and caved it in, he said. Wilson said Judy had entered his room upon hearing the commotion.

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An autopsy found she was killed upon impact to the head, according to Wilson.

Wilson's mother continued to shoot at him, Wilson said. A few bullets ricocheted off two gallon-size containers of gasoline in the room and smashed them open.

The Wilsons stored gas in glass jars in Bobby's bedroom because it was the coolest area of the house, which had no air-conditioning, he said. Gas spilled all over the floor, Wilson said.

Wilson said he then grabbed a single-shot rifle from under his bed and fired at his mother.

He said an autopsy later concluded the shot hit her point-blank in the eye. Wilson then ran to the living room to call for help. As he turned on the light switch to reach for the phone, a spark ignited fumes from the spilled gasoline in the other room, he said.

"The house exploded," Wilson recalled.

According to Wilson, he was blasted through the living-room window and into a barbed-wire fence. He said he received a concussion upon impact and was found unconscious and taken to the hospital.

More: Most shooters got their guns legally, didn't have diagnosed mental illness, new FBI report says

Wilson said his mother and sister were found dead in the house's rubble. A medical examiner declared his mother dead from a combination of the bullet wound and burns, Wilson said.

Wilson said he was arrested by the county sheriff while in the hospital and was thrown in jail. With his two family members dead and he as the sole survivor — and unable at the time to recall what happened — Wilson said the sheriff blamed him and imprisoned him right away.

He said he spent seven or eight months in jail until his employer bailed him out. Wilson said he faced two trials, both of which he said were "inconclusive."

He said that at a third trial in 1973, all charges against him were dropped. He said the district attorney announced the state never had a solid case against him and was wrong all along.

According to Wilson, the district attorney and sheriff apologized for Wilson's ordeals and the judge dismissed all charges against him.

Newspaper, court accounts of killings are much different

Details reported at the time in a local newspaper, in addition to court records from Wilson's case, both differ significantly in numerous regards from Wilson's account to *The Republic*.

The *Choctaw County Weekly*, a publication that compiled articles from multiple area papers, published several stories about the events in the days following the deaths and fire.

The front page of Choctaw County Weekly on June 20, 1963, the day after Bobby Wilson's mother and sister were found dead in their burned home in Hugo, Oklahoma.
COURTESY OF HUGO PUBLISHING COMPANY

The Choctaw County District Court Clerk's Office also provided records about Wilson's case.

Court records list Wilson's last name as Wiste. Wilson said that was because his mother — who was a widow — had the family living under an assumed last name. He said he later changed his last name to Wilson.

According to the June 20, 1963, edition of the *Choctaw County Weekly*, after the fire at the house was extinguished, a water truck sprayed the site of the burned house to allow funeral workers to remove the remains.

According to the newspaper, the charred bodies of Lavonne and Judy Wilson were found lying together in bed "in a 'perfectly relaxed' position, indicating they died in their sleep from suffocation."

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The paper reported that neighbors heard the explosion and rushed to the house to find young Wilson lying in the grass, gasping for breath. The paper said he was suffering from smoke inhalation and had minor cuts and burns.

Initially, authorities anticipated no foul play was involved, but they proceeded with an investigation.

One week later, the paper reported that Wilson had confessed to murdering his mother and sister.

The paper said Wilson led officers to where he buried the rifle used to kill them.

After prompting by his boss at the meat market, "Bobby reflected a moment, and then slowly added that last jigsaw piece with this account — a story already put together by officers, needing only his stamp of authenticity," the *Weekly* wrote.

Wilson admitted to shooting his mother, according to the paper. Then, when his sister ran at him, he crushed her skull with his rifle butt. He placed the bodies on the bed, poured gas around the house and lit a match, the paper reported.

"It was Sheriff Thornton's tenacious insistence that the bodies be sent to the state crime bureau for examination that spoiled what otherwise could easily have been the perfect crime," the *Weekly* reported. "Reports showed death came prior to the fire and from causes that later proved completely accurate."

Copy of the Choctaw County Weekly newspaper's article on June 27, 1963, detailing Bobby Wilson's confession of murder.
COURTESY OF HUGO PUBLISHING COMPANY

Wilson was tried on homicide charges.

Court records show that three years after he was charged with the murders, Wilson filed with the court for "mental incapacity to make a rational defense."

He claimed he suffered from amnesia during the time of the allegations, and with no clear memory of the night's events, was unable to plan his defense with attorneys or tell his side of the story.

The court ordered a jury to decide whether evidence supported Wilson's claims of memory loss.

Four days later, the jury returned its verdict: Wilson indeed suffered from amnesia, they said. The judge ruled Wilson was thus "not capable of proceeding to trial and making a rational defense."

The case was "suspended" until Wilson could regain enough memory to defend himself, the judge said.

More: Unlocked and loaded: Families confront dementia and guns

Seven years later, in late 1973, Wilson moved to dismiss entirely the charges against him.

According to court filings, his attorney argued that because the district attorney, state and district court had taken no action in seven years, he had been "deprived of his right to speedy trial." He added that his witnesses were no longer available because they had died. He motioned for all charges to be dismissed.

The court dismissed his case.

Wilson then moved to Texas for college and law school. After graduating, he practiced law in Texas for 20 years.

Last year, Wilson told the ***Green Valley News***, a southern Arizona publication, that he regained all of his memory of the events in a momentous day as a lawyer.

He was investigating the case of one of his first clients, "who also had been falsely accused of murder," Wilson told the *Green Valley News*.

Alan Korwin, a gun law expert and author of "Arizona Gun Owner's Guide," discusses Arizona's gun laws. Thomas Hawthorne/azcentral

He said he was looking for clues in the woman's vehicle, when he smelled the combination of gasoline and blood.

"The horrible, nauseating smells off the car plummeted me back like a lightning bolt to that fateful night in my childhood, and all the memories flooded in," Wilson told the paper. "It was an incredibly disturbing experience, but it also brought relief: Now I had the truth."

Wilson told the *Green Valley News* that after his amnesia subsided, he could fully recount the events of that night in 1963. He proceeded to pen a book and tell his version of the story.

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Wilson moved to Arizona in 1995 to teach law as a college professor.

According to **his candidate website**, he also owned a private-investigation agency in Arizona for 10 years.

The Maricopa County Community College District hired Wilson in 1995 as an adjunct faculty member in the criminal-justice department, where he remains active.

He teaches paralegals at Rio Salado College. He said he is a three-time recipient of a **teaching award for adjunct faculty** at the college.

More on gun laws, and an Oklahoma City bombing conspiracy

In the interview with *The Republic*, Wilson stood by his remarks about gun-control legislation and doubled-down on his belief that "good" armed people are "the only way" to stop gun violence.

"When I was in high school, all of the high-school boys had rifles and shotguns in their cars every day when they came to school, and nobody shot anybody at school, and nobody even thought about it," Wilson said.

"In today's world, we've got people walking into the public schools and public events and killing innocent people, and yes, the only way you can stop that is somebody better have a firearm to put a stop to it."

Wilson reiterated his belief that legislation will make no difference.

MORE: Good guy with gun in Giffords shooting touts training if teachers are armed

"I don't think you can control people's behavior by passing laws," he said. "They keep looking for a magic-bullet law that they can pass where it's gonna put an end to the killings and the gun violence, and they're not gonna find the magic bullet. There is no magic bullet."

In another take on American government, **Wilson penned a 2016 book** explaining his theory that the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing was part of a government sting operation and that "a massive cover-up had occurred and possibly an innocent man executed."

Man who helped save Gabby Giffords responds

State Rep. Daniel Hernandez, D-Tucson, was seated next to Wilson at the forum — what Hernandez called "a bizarre meeting" — as both are running to represent Legislative District 2 at the Capitol.

Daniel Hernandez
COURTESY OF DANIEL HERNANDEZ

Hernandez was an intern for former Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords in 2011 when she was shot in the head and almost died at a mass shooting outside a Tucson-area supermarket.

He is credited with saving her life. He applied pressure to her forehead wound and made sure she didn't choke on blood.

Giffords was in the audience at the forum.

Hernandez said he was "so confused" upon hearing Wilson's comments, and said he checked with Wilson after the event to make sure he heard correctly.

"I thought I had misheard him," Hernandez said. "We were just like 'Wait, what did he just say?!'

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"Even though I was sitting right next to him, it just took me aback that at this forum put on by Moms Demand Action, when we were talking about common-sense gun-violence prevention, he was talking about how he had to kill his mother in what I take is self-defense," Hernandez said.

After his experience at the Jan. 8, 2011, shooting, Hernandez became an outspoken advocate for gun-violence prevention at the state and federal levels.

"The idea that we can't actually do anything as a policymaker is just something that baffles me to this day," Hernandez said.

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The 2011 Gabby Giffords shooting near Tucson

Candidate: Giffords 'created a target'

Wilson said he was aware of Hernandez's story and knew that he "supposedly" helped Giffords in the moments immediately after the shooting. Wilson said he expected to be "booed and heckled" at the event given its focus on gun-control measures.

"I knew it was gonna be a hostile audience when I went," Wilson said. "I just thought, 'I'm gonna go in and tell them how I think, and they can throw rocks or bananas or whatever, I don't care.' "

Wilson said Giffords should have had security with her at the 2011 supermarket meet and greet.

"She basically created a target," he said. "Anytime you have a group of celebrities or a group of people like at the forum last night, you better have security there. It's the same with a public school."

Wilson mentioned that an armed officer was present in the back of the church at Monday's forum, which he said made the boos after his comments seem "pretty hypocritical" and "ironic" to him.

But Hernandez said that even if armed people are present in a violent incident, they still may not act, be it for lack of training or for not wanting to add to the "confusion" in a mass-shooting event.

He added that the officer present on Monday was a trained professional.

"(Wilson's) notion of all you need is a good guy with a gun is I think just bonkers," Hernandez said. "It was utter shock at hearing a candidate talk about killing his own mother, and then also just being really surprised that he would come to this forum where gun-violence prevention was really the main topic."

District 2 is a Democratic stronghold encompassing parts of Pima County and Santa Cruz County, south of Tucson. All three Democratic incumbents are running for re-election this fall.

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