

Biography of
THE HONORABLE HENRY “HANK” WILKINS, IV
ARKANSAS STATE SENATOR



ASSISTANT PRO TEMPORE
SENATE DISTRICT 5

Senator Henry “Hank” Wilkins, IV, is serving his third term in the Arkansas Senate representing the citizens of Senate District 5, which is comprised of portions of Arkansas, Desha, Jefferson, Lincoln and Phillips Counties. He is an Assistant Pro Tempore for the 87th General Assembly.

As chairman of the Arkansas Legislative Council, Senator Wilkins is the first African-American in Arkansas history elected to the position. Additionally, he is chairman of the ALC-Executive Committee and vice chairman of the Senate Insurance and Commerce Committee and the Legislative Joint Auditing-Counties and Municipalities Committee. He holds membership on numerous committees, subcommittees and task forces, including Joint Budget, Senate Judiciary, Senate Children and Youth, Senate Efficiency, Legislative Joint Auditing, Desegregation Litigation Oversight Subcommittee and the Public School Desegregation Lawsuit Resolution Task Force.

Senator Wilkins is active with several regional and national organizations, including the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), where he serves on the Communications, Financial Services and Interstate Commerce Committee and the Human Services and Welfare Committee; the Council of State Governments (CSG), where he serves on the Intergovernmental Affairs Committee; and the Southern Legislative Conference (SLC), where he is a member of four committees.

Senator Wilkins has authored legislation on a variety of topics addressing important issues such as education, seatbelts and racial profiling. Most recently, he was the lead sponsor of Act 308 of 2009, which created the mandatory seatbelt law in Arkansas. National recognition has followed him as lead sponsor of Act 308. He received the 2010 Lifesavers Award sponsored by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration for his leadership and commitment to saving lives and reducing injuries in Arkansas. Additionally, he was named 2010 Friend of Children by the Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families for his dedication to passing a primary seatbelt law, appropriating funds to support substance abuse treatment for children and families, as well as his longstanding history of supporting the needs of low-income, minority and vulnerable populations in Arkansas.

His other recent awards include:

- 2009 Meharry Medical College Seatbelt Champion Award
- 2009 Martin Luther King Commission Rebirth Award
- 2009 Mothers Against Drunk Driving Community Champions Award
- 2009 Public Health Hero Award

In 2001, Pine Bluff Housing Authority renamed a building on its campus the Henry “Hank” Wilkins, IV Community Center in honor of Senator Wilkins.

Prior to the Senate, Senator Wilkins served one term in the Arkansas House of Representatives, where both his father and mother served. He is past president of the Arkansas Legislative Black Caucus and founding member and past president of the Arkansas Legislative Black Caucus Foundation.

Born in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, Wilkins attended Pine Bluff public schools and is a graduate of Pine Bluff High School. He obtained his bachelor's degree from the University of Michigan. Following college he attended law school at the University of Arkansas School of Law. While in law school, he acted on a call to ordained ministry and in 1977 became pastor of Saint James United Methodist Church of Fayetteville while still a full-time law school student.

After law school, he entered seminary and received a Masters of Divinity degree from Saint Paul School of Theology in Kansas City, Missouri. He taught for 17 years in the Perkins School of Theology Course of Study at Southern Methodist University in Dallas. He also taught for several years in the Saint Paul School of Theology Course of Study in Kansas City as well as participated and preached in evangelistic, medical and fact-finding missions in such places as the Philippines and Costa Rica.

Wilkins has served on the area staff of the United Methodist Church in Arkansas and has pastored churches in Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri and Texas. Throughout his 33 years in ministry, every church he has pastored has experienced significant numerical, spiritual and financial growth. He has been pastor of Saint James Church in Pine Bluff since 1994. Under his leadership, the historic church completed a new multimillion-dollar complex near the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, where Wilkins is a campus minister. His congregation has experienced a twenty-fold growth in membership and is now the largest African-American United Methodist Church in Arkansas.

Wilkins is civically active at many levels, having been president of the parent-teacher association in three different public schools, president of the Dallas Chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, secretary of the National Black Methodists for Church Renewal (BMCR) and member of the BMCR National Board of Directors for nearly 20 years. He was honored by his graduate theological seminary in 2000 with a coveted Distinguished Graduate Award and in 1998 received a Doctorate of Humane Letters from Philander Smith College.

Senator Wilkins and his wife, Phyllis, have been married 32 years. They have two sons, Hank Wilkins, V, a graduate of Harvard University, and Wesley, a college senior at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff. Senator Wilkins is author of "Faith in Public Service," a book to be released in 2010.