



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on November 26, 2010

Rep. Joe Wilsons Political Problems

Best known for his unseemly outburst “You lie!” during President Obama’s speech on immigration reform in September, 2009, Rep. Joe Wilson (R-S.C.) was just re-elected to Congress for a sixth term. Beating his rival for the seat by 10 points, Wilson ran as a Tea Party favorite.

Wilson has been plagued during his tenure with various challenges, problems and difficulties. Just last week the House ethics committee [announced](#) that it will continue its investigation into Wilsons alleged abuse of taxpayer expense money during several trips abroad. According to *Congressional Quarterly*, Wilson ranks 39th among 730 members of Congress tracked since 1994 in travel-related expenses.



Back in May, Wilson signed on to support a bill that would impose a value-added-tax (VAT) on imports from countries already suffering under their own VAT. While a member of the South Carolina Senate, Wilson voted for a bill that would have provided state-funded paid leave for state employees performing disaster relief services, and a bill requiring men between 18 and 26 to register for the Selective Service System in order to apply for a drivers license. While in the House, he voted his socially conservative conscience, co-sponsoring federal prohibition of online poker and Internet gambling. He supported small business with a law allowing increased write-offs for investments made in business equipment and machinery and the second round of Bush tax cuts in 2003.

Wilson says that [his mission](#) is to fight for conservative principles that promote fiscal responsibility, expand liberty and create a strong national defense. My first priority is to ensure that our nation is prepared and equipped to protect American families. A Democrat familiar with Wilsons voting record says that Wilson is one of the Pentagons best friends. From his four military sons to his backing of Bush, Cheney, and Rumsfeld, Wilson is their reliable ally. And he enjoys a Freedom Index rating of an impressive 90.

His biggest problem at present, however, is how to balance his constituencies. With the Presidential Deficit Commissions report due out next week which will advocate cuts in spending including some modest military cuts, Wilson is caught in the middle. His 2nd Congressional district includes Fort Jackson, Parris Island, and several other bases, and his new position will be as chairman of the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Military Personnel. So when another deficit panel, [The Debt Reduction Task Force](#), took sharper aim at military spending cuts, Wilson received a phone call from Tom Philpott of Military.com asking him what he would do. The task force called for reductions in COLA, increased fees for [TRICARE](#) and doubling of outpatient visit costs to members of the military services. One of the recommendations made by the panel was to bring TRICARE fees back to the level they were in 1995 when those fees covered just 27 percent of the costs of the program. Currently



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TRICARE premiums cover only 11 percent of those costs.

According to Philpott, Wilson said he is not only committed to protecting TRICARE beneficiaries from fee increases, but wants to expand military entitlements by eliminating some offsets, lowering of the age to start receiving benefits, and providing additional pay to those members who are forced to retire prior to reaching their 20 years due to disability or injury.

And so that is Wilsons problem: He ran on Tea Party principles of less government, more freedom, reducing spending, and in general pushing back against an increasingly intrusive and costly government. And in many areas, his views and voting record supports that position. But when it comes to military costs and defense spending, all promises go out the window. Protecting his electoral base appears to be more important than supporting his principles. Wilsons problem then is that faced by so many in Congress: running for a seat in Congress, and then keeping it.

Photo: House Foreign Affairs Committee member Rep. Joe Wilson, R-S.C., gives a 'thumbs-up' on Capitol Hill in Washington, Dec. 10, 2009, prior to the start of the committee's hearing on Afghanistan: AP Images



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