

Memorial Resolution

Honorable John K. Wilson

1944-2019

Retired Judge John Kay Wilson was born April 27, 1944 in Elizabethton, Carter County, Tennessee. He passed away December 19, 2019. Judge Wilson was a loving husband, father, grandfather, son and brother. His family that survive to mourn his loss and cherish his memory are his wife of 53 years, Nancy (Waggoner) Wilson; children: John Waggoner Wilson and wife, Heather; Kimberly (Wilson) Carter and husband, Scott; grandchildren: Charlotte Grace and Victoria Carter and Miranda, Sarah, and Emma Wilson; one sister; and two brothers. Judge Wilson was preceded in death by his father and a brother, and his mother died eight months after Judge Wilson passed. He was a faithful member of the First Baptist Church of Greeneville, Tennessee and Gideons International.

Judge Wilson's parents were Albert Wilson and Ethel (Cates) Wilson. Among the ancestors on his mother's side were the Hyders and Whiteheads – some of the first and finest families of Carter County, Tennessee. Several of his ancestors and their kinsmen were with those now famous frontiersmen who gathered at Sycamore Shoals and marched to fight at Kings Mountain. On his father's side the Wilsons were early pioneers of Bland and Tazewell Counties in Virginia. The Johnstons and Rogers were among the earliest Scots-Irish settlers of what would later be the town of Rogersville in Hawkins County, Tennessee. None were wealthy in a pecuniary sense, but they lived well for their day and were all hard working, crafty, and honest folks. They passed their best traits on to their descendant whose name heads this memorial, and the inheritance he gained from them marked him for success in life.

Judge Wilson was educated from grade school through high school in the "Training School" which is now the "University School" in Johnson City, Tennessee. He received a bachelor's degree from East Tennessee State University also in Johnson City, Tennessee. He earned his juris doctorate from University of Tennessee Law School in Knoxville, and a couple of months later joined the United States Airforce during the Vietnam Era. After his discharge, he began his legal career in Greeneville, Tennessee. He was only in private practice a short time when he was hired as an assistant prosecutor under District Attorney General Heiskell H. Winstead. He served in that capacity until 1979 and developed a reputation as a competent and aggressive prosecutor back in the day when many, many cases were tried to juries each term of court.

On January 24, 1979, Judge Wilson was elevated to the bench and sworn in as a circuit judge for Greene, Hamblen, and Hawkins Counties after being appointed by Governor Lamar Alexander to fill the unexpired term of Judge Thomas G. Hull of Greeneville who, himself, had become a Federal Judge for the Eastern District of Tennessee. In 1984, Greene, Hamblen, Hawkins, and Hancock Counties were joined to form the presently existing 3rd Judicial District where Judge Wilson served the remainder of his tenure. As a testament to his popularity as a jurist and public personality, Judge Wilson stood for election five times and was unopposed each time. He retired from the bench June 30, 2014. The judge was known for his big smile and warm personality, which drew in everyone he met with instant affection. He made litigants and court personnel comfortable and was always in a good mood, affable, and welcoming.

Judge Wilson was also known for pioneering in the area of alternative dispute resolution. Many a case has been settled when Judge Wilson conducted his famously anticipated settlement conferences prior to beginning trials. He had a knack of making the lawyers forget all the reasons a case should be tried and focus on why they should be settled – and many were.

Judge Wilson was a trusted and faithful jurist and presided over innumerable trials over his long career. He was frequently called upon to preside over many of the complicated and lengthy jury trials in the 3rd Judicial District. Many lawyers have fond memories and deep gratitude for Judge Wilson's kindness and advice during their time as beginning attorneys. His memory will be cherished by the bar of east Tennessee; his spirit, humor, and quiet competence always remembered and appreciated; and, perhaps most remembered of all, his big warm smile that earned him the name "The Smiling Judge".

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Tennessee Judicial Conference that the foregoing memorial resolution in honor of our dear departed colleague, HONORABLE JOHN KAY WILSON, be entered on the minutes of the Conference, that a copy be furnished to Thomson West Publishing Company for publication in *Tennessee Decisions* and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this tribute and resolution be furnished to his family.

Respectfully submitted this the 16th day of June, 2021.

Douglas T. Jenkins
Chancellor
Third Judicial District

Beth Boniface
Circuit Court Judge
Third Judicial District

Alex E. Pearson
Circuit Court Judge
Third Judicial District

Thomas J. Wright
Circuit Court Judge
Third Judicial District

John F. Dugger
Criminal Court Judge
Third Judicial District