

Ex-Worker Rattles Gov. Wilson on Immigration Stand

The New York Times

May 4, 1995, Thursday, Late Edition - Final

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Distribution: National Desk

Section: Section A; ; Section A; Page 16; Column 3; National Desk ; Column 3;

Length: 1035 words

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Dateline: LOS ANGELES, May 3

Body

Gov. Pete **Wilson**, who has said he will make strict **immigration** controls a major campaign issue if he runs for President next year, once hired a Mexican house worker in the late 1970's who now says she was an illegal alien at the time.

Mr. **Wilson**, who was then Mayor of San Diego, also failed to withhold and pay to the Government the woman's Social Security taxes, as required by Federal law.

In statements issued today, in response to reporters' questions, the Governor and his legal aides said he did not know that the employee, Josefina Klag of Tijuana, had no **immigration** documents when he and his wife, Betty, whom he has since divorced, hired her as a maid in 1978 for \$25 a day.

In any event, the statements added, it was not until 1986 that Federal law required an employer to verify an employee's legal status. Further, they said, the actual hiring and paying was done by Mr. **Wilson**'s wife.

As for the Social Security taxes, Mr. **Wilson** said he and his former wife, now Betty Hosie of San Diego, would make a back payment "expeditiously." He estimated that the payment, including penalties and interest, would come to about \$3,000.

"I can categorically state that I have never knowingly employed an illegal immigrant and never intentionally failed to make payment of the employer's contribution to Social Security for an employee," said the Governor, a Republican who won re-election last year on a platform that included a strong **immigration**-control plank and who is expected to formally announce his candidacy for President later this month.

Then he added:

"It was a very long time ago, but if I had known at the time that Ms. Klag wasn't a legal resident, we would not have hired her. Having said that, Betty and I are taking the necessary steps to determine and satisfy our obligation to pay Social Security taxes and penalties. We will pay them fully and expeditiously based upon our shared responsibility."

Mr. **Wilson** was Mayor of San Diego from 1971 to 1983.

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The back payment of \$3,000 may be relatively light for the Governor. But the tardy payment, and most especially the disclosure that Ms. Klag was in the country illegally when hired, will almost certainly be hefty political baggage in any Wilson political campaign.

Similar violations have burdened and embarrassed other candidates and figures in public life in recent years, including several Clinton Administration nominees.

Ms. Klag, who continued to work for the Governor's former wife until 1992 and now works for another family in the La Jolla section of San Diego, could not be reached for comment.

But according to the statements released today, she recently told Mr. Wilson's legal and financial advisers that when she was hired in early 1978 she was not a legal resident of the United States and, in fact, did not obtain legal status until the spring of 1979.

Also, according to statements, the Governor's former wife, like the Governor, did not know that Ms. Klag was an illegal alien at the time she was hired.

The statements further show that though Ms. Hosie learned several years after her divorce from Mr. Wilson in 1981 that she should be paying Ms. Klag's Social Security taxes, she took no action to do so.

Ms. Hosie says in one of the documents:

"I never asked her if she was in the country legally and she never gave me cause to believe otherwise. I employed Josefina; my husband did not. I do not recall ever discussing her legal status with him. Sometime in the mid-1980's, after our divorce, I became aware I had an obligation to contribute to Social Security on behalf of Josefina. When I did learn of my obligation, I continued to procrastinate and did not seek to correct my delinquency until recently. I called the Governor's office. I had never previously disclosed this to the Governor."

Touching on that notification, the Governor's lawyer, John Davies, said in a memorandum he sent the Governor, included in one of the statements: "I infer that news reports of your possible Presidential candidacy may have caused Betty to focus on this matter, resulting in her call."

Mrs. Hosie refused, in a brief telephone interview, to discuss the matter.

The statements from the Governor were issued after reporters approached his aides about rumors spreading in California and Washington that he might have violated Federal immigration and tax laws relating to an immigrant maid.

Thousands of immigrant maids, legal and illegal, now work in the United States, many of them in California. Tax authorities say employers frequently do not pay their Social Security taxes as required by law, particularly those who employ immigrants without proper papers.

In last fall's California elections, Mr. Wilson won a second term in good part because of his strong advocacy of restrictive immigration measures. In particular he was outspoken in support of Proposition 187, a proposal on the state ballot that called for cutting off most social services, including schooling and nonemergency medical care, to illegal aliens.

The measure was passed overwhelmingly, an indication of the strong concern about illegal immigration in California, the state hardest hit by the problem.

Representative Michael Huffington, a Republican from Santa Barbara, also came out in strong support of the Proposition 187 in his bid last fall to unseat Senator Dianne Feinstein. But his campaign, on which he spent a record-setting \$28 million of his personal fortune, faltered and ultimately failed after it was disclosed that he had once employed an illegal alien as a maid and, further, had also failed to pay her Social Security taxes.

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Like Mr. Wilson, Mr. Huffington sent in a late payment and said his wife had done the actual hiring and paying of the maid. But by then Ms. Feinstein, a Democrat from San Francisco, was on her way to victory.

Yet she, too, had problems with the immigration issue.

Mr. Huffington, while admitting that he had hired an illegal alien, said Ms. Feinstein had also once employed an illegal maid.

The Senator countered that she had never knowingly hired any illegal immigrant and that the woman in question had submitted documents that indicated she was in this country legally.

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Subject: SOCIAL SECURITY (90%); GOVERNORS (90%); TAXES & TAXATION (90%); IMMIGRATION (89%); ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS (89%); HEADS OF GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS (89%); PASSPORTS & VISAS (78%); ELECTIONS (78%); CAMPAIGNS & ELECTIONS (78%); US PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES 2008 (78%); POLITICS (78%); IMMIGRATION LAW (78%); PLATFORMS & ISSUES (78%); POLITICAL CANDIDATES (78%); FINES & PENALTIES (71%)

Geographic: SAN DIEGO, CA, USA (93%)

Load-Date: May 4, 1995

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