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Conte says he never dealt with ex-CIA operative

WASHINGTON — Outside of one brief encounter 10 years ago, Rep. Silvio Conte of Massachusetts said yesterday, he never had dealings with Edwin P. Wilson, a former CIA operative implicated in a scheme to illegally sell electronic spying equipment and terrorist weapons to the operatives of Libyan leader Col. Moammar Khadafy.

"About 10 years ago, I went to a sportsmen's dinner downtown and I met this guy along with a group of other people," said Conte, a 23-year veteran of Congress from Pittsfield, and an avid hunter. "They said he had a big farm in Virginia and we arranged to go deer hunting there."

Conte said he and a group of other hunters, the names of whom he said he couldn't remember, spent a Saturday morning hunting on Wilson's farm, but they didn't bag any deer. He said Wilson was on the farm but he didn't join the hunting party.

"I don't know Mr. Wilson outside of that," Conte said. "I've had no social contact with the guy, and he's never been in this office and he's never called this office."

Conte's name appeared in a New York Times Magazine article Sunday on Wilson, his associate Frank E. Terpil and their business relationship with the Libyan government.

In the article by Seymour M. Hersh, it was alleged that Wilson was friendly with many senior legislators in Washington including Senators Strom Thurmond of South Carolina, the late John L. McClellan of Arkansas, and Rep. Conte.

"Wilson never asked me for any favors, and if he had in connection with his Libyan dealings, I would have hit him on the head with the butt of a gun," Conte said.

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