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Sires Introduces Urban Park Legislation to Congress with Support from NRPA

OPTIONS

“ **Once you fix the urban parks, people will come** ”

Landmark Urban Park Summit in September Preceded Introduction of Act

Washington, D.C. ([Vocus/PRWEB](#)) October 8, 2009 -- The cause of healthier, vibrant urban communities in America got a major boost yesterday, Oct. 7, when Rep. Albio Sires of New Jersey's 13th District introduced the Urban Revitalization and Livable Communities Act (H.R. 3734) to Congress. The act provides federal assistance grants (which must be matched with local funds) to rehabilitate and develop urban parks and

community recreational infrastructure, and for the continued investment in programs that address such national issues as juvenile delinquency and issues affecting at-risk youth.

The bill goes to the heart of the collective thinking that emerged when Rep. Sires presented a draft two weeks earlier at NRPA's Urban Park Summit in Washington, D.C., during which the association brought together a select group of mayors, high ranking administration officials, Congressional leaders and urban park directors. In bringing together such key players, the [NRPA](#) built needed support for urban parks in the White House administration's new urban policy plans while helping to secure Congressional and White House support for urban parks.



The Urban Park Summit was designed to allow mayors and park directors to sit side-by-side with high-level members of the White House, U.S. departments of Interior, Transportation, and Housing and Urban Development, the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Through frank and open exchanges, the participants were able to address essential needs and emerging opportunities for urban parks in America. More importantly, all parties were able to offer their views on meeting the needs of urban parks and the critical role they play in revitalizing urban areas.

Speakers at the federal level included: Ken Salazar, secretary, U.S. Department of the Interior; Ron Sims, deputy secretary, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development; John Porcari, deputy secretary, U.S. Department of Transportation; Sergio Rojas, executive director, President's Council on Physical Fitness; John Frece, director, Development, Community and Environment Division, EPA; Myra Blakely, deputy director, Office of Brownfields and Land Revitalization, EPA; Dr. Howard Frumkin, director, National Center for Environmental Health and Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; Susan Mockenhaupt, chief, Urban and Community Forestry Program; U.S. Forest Service; David Agnew, chief, White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs; and, Adolfo Carrion, director, White House Office of Urban Policy.

More than 25 urban park directors also participated in the summit, including those from New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Atlanta, as well as smaller cities and counties from across the country.

At the summit, it was apparent that for the first time in more than 30 years, disparate federal agencies are finally aligning on urban policy, for which all agreed parks must play a key role. White House Director of Urban Policy Adolpho Carrion described how his department requested reviews from 16 federal agencies on how the investments and programs determine what does and does not work in furthering urban policy goals. "We're going through that right now, and that information will be used in our 2011 budget conversation," Carrion said. "The federal investment should be led by smart thinking and it needs to be taken out of the political process."

"Park directors can expect a place at the table when the White House crafts its policy on urban affairs," Carrion added. "President Obama is an urbanist—he gets it. There's no learning curve. We were able to just kick it off and start working right away. This administration is on your side, but we are preaching to the choir. Our biggest customer is the Congress of the United States."

While the Urban Park Summit morning events dealt with issues and trends in urban parks policy and achieving alignment among federal officials, the afternoon sessions concentrated on converting policy support into Congressional funding support.

Rep. Sires, a former mayor of West New York, N.J., described the good things that happened in his district when parks got much needed funding and attention. "Once you fix the urban parks, people will come," Sires told the Summit. Now that he's in Congress, Rep. Sires wants to continue with this line of thinking.

"I'm here to tell you I need your help," Rep. Sires told the Summit. "You have the network. Talk to your members."

Barbara Tulipane, CEO of [NRPA](#), agreed, saying the association would devote its energies and resources to capitalize on the momentum created at the summit. "It's now incumbent upon us all to make sure Congress knows that parks and recreation are integral into making America's urban communities vibrant and healthy."

In addition to [NRPA](#), 22 members of the U.S. House of Representatives have also joined Rep. Sires in support of this legislation as original co-sponsors on the bill, including: Earl Blumenauer (D-OR), Mike Capuano (D-MA), Donna Chistensen (D-VI), Stephen Cohen (D-TN), Artur Davis (D-AL), Danny Davis (D-IL), Chaka Fattah (D-PA), Luis Gutierrez (D-IL), Jesse Jackson, Jr. (D-IL), Patrick Kennedy (D-RI), John Lewis (D-GA), Daniel Lipinski (D-IL), Carolyn Maloney (D-NY), Mike McMahon (D-NY), Donald Payne (D-NJ), Mike Quigley (D-IL), Ciro Rodriguez (D-TX), Steven Rothman (D-NJ), Bobby Rush (D-IL), Janice Schakowsky (D-IL), Jose Serrano (D-NY), and Edolphus Towns (D-NY).

The National Recreation and Park Association is a national not-for-profit organization dedicated to advancing park, recreation and conservation efforts that enhance quality of life for all people. Through its network of 21,000 professionals and citizens, [NRPA](#) encourages the promotion of healthy lifestyles, recreation initiatives, and conservation of natural and cultural resources.

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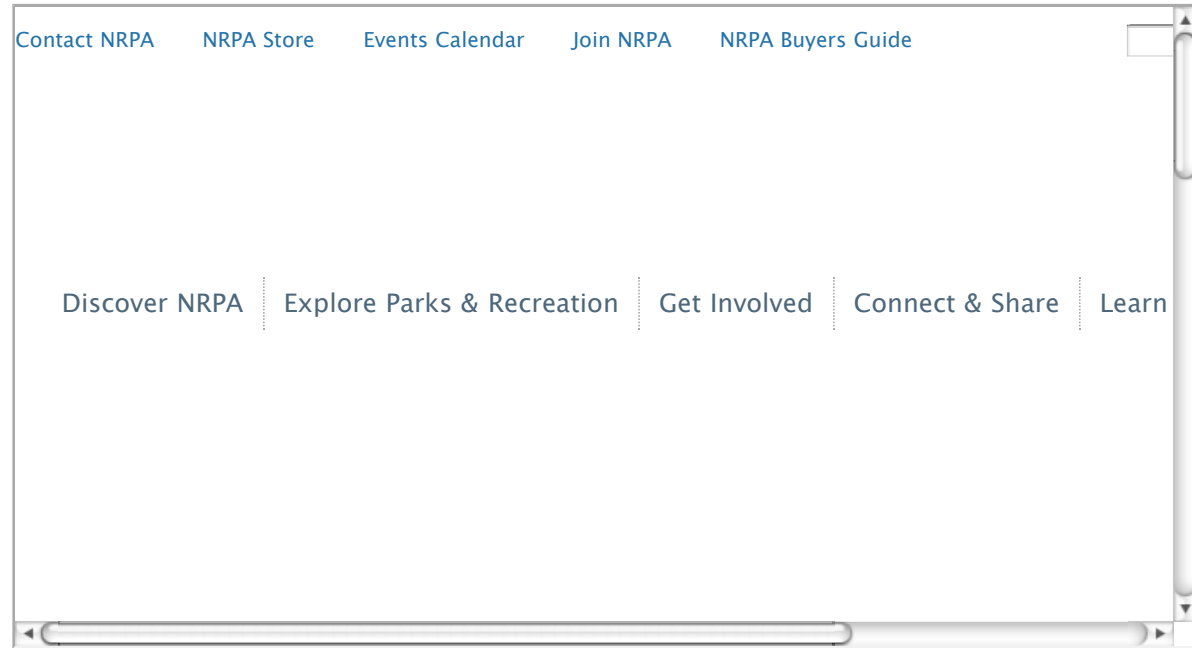
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