



E-newsletter Updates

- Congressman Sires sends email updates from Washington.
- The updates contain information about legislation, his committee work, votes, meetings, and other events that took place in Congress.
- Congressman Sires also asks for opinions on upcoming votes.
- To receive the newsletters, constituents can subscribe by visiting Congressman Sires' website at: www.house.gov/sires
- AOL and Yahoo! users may find that e-newsletters are delivered to their spam boxes. Please check your spam box in order to view the e-newsletter.

We're Here To Help!

If you encounter a problem with a federal agency and need assistance, please contact any of my offices. My staff may be able to intervene on your behalf and help to ensure you receive a prompt response. Here are some of the areas in which we may help:

- Federal Student Loans
- Mail Delivery & Service
- Veteran's Benefits & Military Service Problems
- FHA & VA Home Loan Applications
- Social Security & Medicare Benefits
- Consumer Protection Referrals
- IRS Problems
- Disaster Assistance
- Small Business Loan Information
- Regulatory Compliance
- Immigration, Naturalization, and Citizenship

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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Official Business

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and mailed at taxpayer expense.

Dear Friend,

It is my pleasure to update you on some of the issues I have been working on since arriving in Washington as your congressman this January. While this newsletter addresses many of the important concerns that affect New Jersey families every day, I wanted to speak to you first about one that I believe is at the forefront of our minds: Iraq.

I am gravely concerned about the direction of the war in Iraq and am appalled that more and more of our brave men and women continue to die for a failed foreign policy. Over 400 troops from New Jersey alone have died or been wounded since the start of the war. We have recently heard from our military commanders that our armed services are stretched dangerously thin and sectarian violence continues to rise. The president's policy has mired us in the quicksand of a civil war and has created a rallying point for millions of extremists around the world. That is why I supported legislation in March that would have put a definitive end date to our policing of the Iraqi civil war and would have redeployed our troops out of Iraq as quickly as reasonably possible. It also would have ensured that our troops are adequately trained and equipped before being deployed to Iraq. They have sacrificed tirelessly for our country and deserve nothing less.

The Iraq war is costing us a staggering \$8 BILLION per month — money that could have been used to provide health insurance for every single American, create millions of units of affordable housing and better protect our homeland from a terrorist attack. According to the Iraqis themselves, they will need an additional \$100 billion over the next four years to rebuild their infrastructure. That is why I introduced legislation that would require the Iraqi government to match American reconstruction funding dollar for dollar, forcing the Iraqis to take greater responsibility for their own reconstruction while allowing us to direct more money for vital services at home. I also cosponsored legislation that would provide much greater audit oversight for the billions of dollars we are investing in Iraq reconstruction, which has been sorely mismanaged during the course of the war.

This May, I voted against an amendment which provided \$94.7 billion for military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Unfortunately, the measure did not address the issue of troop withdrawal from Iraq and did not withhold any of the funds for release later in the year following a second congressional vote. Instead, it established 18 "benchmarks" for the Iraqi government and required the president to report on progress towards meeting the benchmarks. The measure did not require the president to withhold reconstruction funds if the benchmarks were not met. After four and a half years, it is past time to demand real accountability in Iraq from both the administration and the Iraqis themselves, and that is why I voted against this measure.

Please know that I am doing everything possible to ensure that American lives do not continue to be sacrificed in a civil war that needs a political solution. In the meantime, if you would like to share your concerns or comments regarding this or any other issue, please contact me anytime. It is an honor to serve you in Congress.

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Sincerely,

Albio Sires,

Protecting Access to Education

Since 2001, interest rates on student loans have risen while tuition and fees have increased 41% at public universities and 17% at private universities when adjusted for inflation. For too many Americans, higher education is simply not an affordable option. As a former teacher, Rep. Sires is committed to providing every single resident of the district with affordable, quality education. Almost as soon as he arrived in Washington, he cosponsored legislation that will cut student loan rates in half within four years. For the 61,000 four-year college students with subsidized loans in New Jersey, passage of this bill ensures that they are not saddled with excessive interest payments upon graduation. Once fully phased in, this college affordability bill will save the typical student borrower \$4,440 over the life of a federal student loan and will allow more access to higher education, which is the surest gateway to future success.

Early education is a key factor in providing a better future for our children. The No Child Left Behind Act, which needs to be reformed to meet the needs of our district's children, has been underfunded by a staggering \$71 billion over the past six years. This year, the president's proposed budget drastically slashes Head Start, which provides almost 15,000 needy New Jersey children with a real leg up as they begin school. Under the proposed budget, over 61,000 students in New Jersey will go without the help they were promised in reading and math and over 41,000 children will not have access to the after school services they were promised.

Rep. Sires is committed to ensuring that our children receive the best education possible - from the day they are born until the day they receive college or graduate degrees. He will continue to oppose misguided policies that seek to shortchange our children and fight to make future generations well educated in order to stay competitive in the global economy.



Providing Better Health Care for All

As soon as Rep. Sires got to Washington, he made sure that more Americans would have access to lifesaving prescription drugs and treatment for diseases. First, he voted to allow the Secretary of Health and Human Services to negotiate directly with drug companies for lower prices under Medicare - ensuring that the agency uses its bargaining power to benefit millions of seniors and disabled New Jerseyans who now have to choose between life saving medication and other basic necessities.

A major problem under the Medicare drug bill that passed several years ago is the existence of the Medicare Part D "doughnut hole," which created an expensive gap in coverage for those in need. Under the law supported by the president, coverage ends for all beneficiaries who reached a threshold of \$2,250 for prescription drug expenses. Beneficiaries are forced to pay their Part D premiums out of pocket, even though coverage does not kick in until their total drug costs reach \$5,100. Many Medicare beneficiaries are denied payment for

their drug costs between \$2,250 and \$5,100 - but they will still have to pay monthly premiums. This "doughnut hole" penalizes the sick, including those with chronic conditions such as diabetes and hypertension. Rep. Sires voted to close the "doughnut hole" by dedicating the cost savings from price negotiation toward ending the coverage gap under the current law. He will continue to fight until the legislation passed by the House is signed into law, so that no New Jerseyan is denied life-saving medication because of an inability to pay.

Rep. Sires also voted to provide \$650 million this year for the State Children's Health Insurance Program (S-CHIP), which goes a long way towards ensuring that New Jersey's quarter million children without health insurance have access to care. He is also fighting to pass \$35 billion in additional funding to improve children's health care over the next five years and will continue working on bipartisan legislation to override the president's veto of S-CHIP.



Fighting for Our Veterans

The House of Representatives passed the Fiscal Year 2008 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill, which appropriates \$87.7 billion for all veterans' programs and is the single largest increase in funding for veterans health care in the Veterans Affairs' history. Rep. Sires is committed to providing veterans with the health care and benefits we promised them by allowing hospitals to hire more doctors and nurses to decrease wait times for appointments. More funding will also be provided for prosthetics research and to help veterans suffering from traumatic brain injury (TBI) and post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).



In light of the unacceptable situations at Walter Reed Army Hospital Center, as well as veterans' hospitals around the country, Rep. Sires was pleased to support H.R. 1538, the Dignified Treatment of Wounded Warriors Act, which unanimously passed the House. This bill directs the Department of Defense and the VA to work together to develop a policy and procedures that allow for a seamless transition for service members as they return from combat and undergo and recuperate from medical treatment. H.R. 1538 provides enhanced care for TBI and PTSD, would mandate record sharing between DOD and the VA, and would improve housing facilities for service members. Additionally, the bill would require the VA to develop procedures to help a veteran transition back into civilian life.

Standing Up for Working Families

Earlier this year, Rep. Sires was proud to help pass the historic Employee Free Choice Act, which will allow workers to form unions and bargain for better wages, benefits and working conditions. This legislation requires employers to recognize a union after a majority of workers sign cards authorizing union representation, provide mediation and arbitration for first-contract disputes and establish stronger penalties for violating the rights of workers who seek to form unions or negotiate first contracts.

Rep. Sires also sponsored a resolution that protects America's letter carriers by asking the United States Postal Service to discontinue its practice of contracting out mail delivery services. This practice can open the door for felons, identity thieves, and terrorists to gain access to the mail and mail boxes of millions of Americans. The protection of our mail delivery services is vital for our national security and a key issue for the working men and women who are qualified to handle our mail.

Consumer Protection

Keeping our children and families safe should always be a top priority. Given recent concerns regarding products imported from around the world, including China, Rep. Sires recently supported a bill which passed the House. The Danny Keisar Child Product Safety Notification Act, H.R. 1699, directs the Consumer Product Safety Commission to require manufacturers of durable infant and toddler products to provide consumers with a postage-paid consumer registration form with each product, as well as the model number and manufacture date, so that consumers can be more easily notified of a recall or safety alert on the product. Under the bill, the standard would apply to products used by children age five and younger, and would include cribs, high chairs, bath seats, strollers, toddler beds, and infant carriers. For information regarding product safety, recalls, or to report an unsafe product, please contact the Consumer Product Safety Commission at:

www.cpsc.gov

Enacting 9/11 Commission Recommendations

This past July, Congress passed legislation to implement the recommendations of the 9/11 Commission, which finally allows vital security measures to be put in place so that our nation's protection becomes standard practice.

The legislation is vital for several reasons, including:

- Providing a greater percentage of Homeland Security grant funding to be risk-based, which will benefit high risk states like New Jersey.
- Requiring 100% of the containers bound for the U.S. to be scanned.
- Requiring the screening of 100% of the cargo on passenger aircraft, including \$250 million annually for checkpoint screening and \$450 annually for baggage screening.
- Authorizing rail and mass transit security grants.
- Ensuring communications among first responders.