

Committee on Resources, Full Committee

- - Rep. James V. Hansen, Chairman

U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20515-6201 - - (202) 225-2761

Witness Statement

Knoxville, Tennessee Mayor Victor Ashe's remarks for the Legislative Hearing by the Committee on Resources on H.R. 701 and H.R. 1592

Americans are justifiably proud of their national park system. From Yosemite to the Everglades, the national parks serve an important purpose in preserving our natural history for future generations and make for memorable once-in-a-lifetime visits.

However, as mayor of Knoxville, Tennessee, I have learned that the most important park to most Americans is the park down the street from where they live. The park down the street from your house is the place you take your children to play baseball, football or soccer. It is the park where you walk with a friend to develop healthier lifestyles. It is probably the park where you had your first picnic with that most important other person in your life.

Developing new local parks is becoming increasingly more difficult. The pressure to develop greenfields for new industrial or commercial uses often makes park use a secondary consideration. In Knoxville, we have just begun to develop a major new park of about 100 acres, which I think will be the last of its size in our city. It will be the last because the city doesn't have the undeveloped land to build another park of this grandeur. And the expense of converting developed property into parkland is many times beyond the reach of local governments.

While it is difficult to develop new facilities, the citizens of Knoxville and most every other American city for that matter, want improved and expanded recreational opportunities.

Two years ago, I joined with NFL star Denver Broncos running back Terrell Davis in addressing your colleagues in the Senate.

Mr. Davis and I urged the senators to keep their promise to support local parks.

When the Congress created the Land and Water Conservation Fund in 1965, it pledged to use the funds collected from off-shore oil and gas drilling to support the development of national, state and local parks.

However, since the 1980s, Congress has used most of this money for budget deficit reduction leaving very little funding for state and local parks programs.

I urge this committee to approve H.R. 701, the Conservation and Reinvestment Act.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund and the Urban Park and Recreation Recovery Program have helped to develop some of the most popular parks in Knoxville, both in the inner city and in other sections of the city.

An example of the success of the federal funding is our Morningside Park, which is the home of the outstanding Alex Haley Statute, the largest statue of an African American in the nation.

Other parks so developed include the Harriet Tubman Park and Westview Park.

And we have an Urban Park and Recreation Recovery Program grant application to develop Caswell Park, which will be a multi-use facility located in the city's HUD designated Empowerment Zone area.

Using these models, Knoxville has been very successful in developing new parks and greenways.

While many people like park development is nice and good for the quality of life, there are many other important factors to consider in park funding.

These park improvements strengthen the fabric of our community by providing young people with a safe place to gather and play.

Across the nation and right here in Knoxville, communities have learned that when you improve recreational opportunities for children, the crime rate goes down.

Many mayors have found that if you reduce your Parks budget, you need to increase the Police budget by a like amount to handle the problems of teenagers on the streets with no where to go.

Park improvements are an investment in our future.... They are an investment in our youth.

Thank you for this opportunity to address the members of this committee.

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