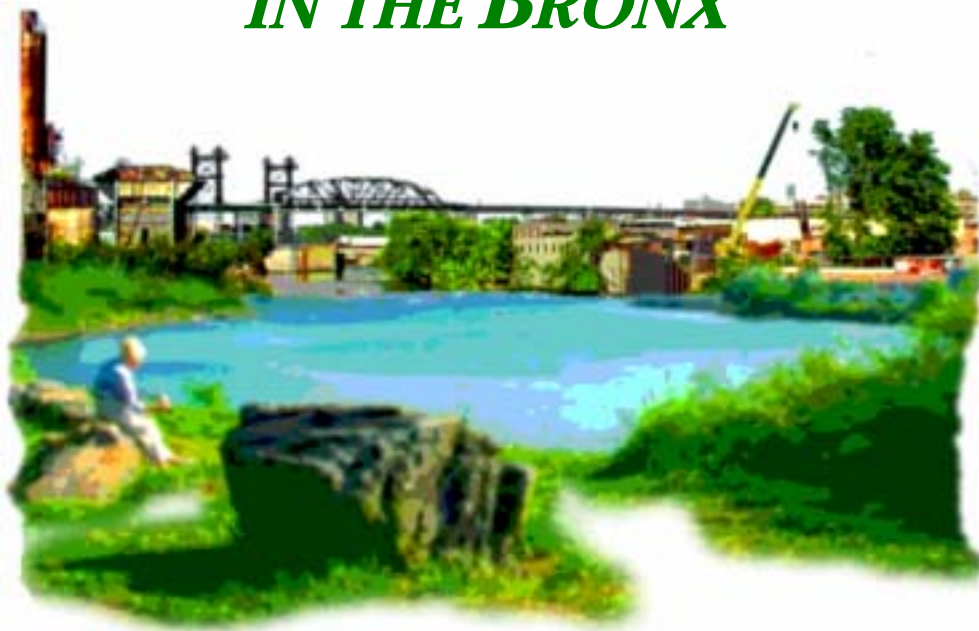


A GREATER SENSE OF PRIDE

JOSÉ E. SERRANO

AND

*ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE
IN THE BRONX*



U.S. REPRESENTATIVE JOSÉ E. SERRANO, 2005

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Children and families in the Bronx have suffered enough. Our communities must be treated fairly and with the same respect as other communities in the city and state.

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José E. Serrano, Statement, April 5, 2001

Dear Friends:

It is no secret that our government treats poor communities unequally, but environmental injustice poses a particularly sinister threat. Environmental problems may not make headlines or grab our attention like a war, but persistent environmental hazards in the Bronx are taking the lives of our children just the same.

Those of us in the Bronx don't need statistics to convince us that a link exists between poverty and exposure to environmental harm. Our neglected landscape—marred by sewage plants, waste transfer stations, scrap metal yards and power stations— provides ample evidence that the most economically vulnerable among us bear the brunt of our society's environmental ills.

Relief for our lungs is not the only thing at stake for the Bronx as we wrestle with these issues. The often overlooked presence of noxious pollutants and environmental eyesores in places where we live, work and play have taken a heavy toll on our economy, our ecosystems and our physical and mental well-being. Residents of low income communities not only are less able to ward off harmful activities that encroach upon their neighborhoods, but they also often lack the necessary resources to enforce what few protections they should receive under existing laws.

Fortunately, more and more of us are coming to recognize that a clean and safe environment is not a luxury reserved for the privileged, but a right due to all Americans regardless of their wealth, income, race or ethnicity. This trend is promising as we continue to build on our communities' past successes. Only through our continued vigilance will we finally achieve true environmental justice for ourselves and future generations.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Joe E. Seno", followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

RESTORATION OF THE BRONX RIVER

The 23 mile-long Bronx River begins in Westchester County and flows through the heart of the Bronx before emptying into the East River. Along its banks lie Hunts Point, Soundview, West Farms and other vibrant neighborhoods of the Bronx, as well as the New York Botanical Garden and the Bronx Zoo.



The storied river, which possibly predates the Ice Age, is a landmark known for its long history of use by various peoples. Before the arrival of Europeans, bounteous supplies of trout from the river helped to sustain the livelihoods of Native Americans who fished along its shores. In the 17th century, the Bronx River attracted European trappers with its abundance of beavers.

By the late 19th century, however, urbanization had transformed the river's once-pristine waters into an open cesspool of industrial and household sewage. Despite numerous attempts to clean up the contamination throughout much of the 20th century, the condition of the portion of the river in the South Bronx failed to improve significantly. Fortunately, as increasing numbers of local residents came to appreciate the past and potential value of the urban river to their communities, they have made

noteworthy strides to reverse the river's cycle of dilapidation.

The Bronx River's condition saw a major turning point when Congressman Serrano began his advocacy for its restoration. He has secured millions of dollars in federal funding through the Appropriations process to support Bronx River initiatives carried out by both local organizations and federal agencies. In addition, the model for revitalization and restoration that Congressman Serrano has pursued for the Bronx River has informed current efforts to bring new life to the East River and Harlem River shorelines in the Bronx—projects for which the Congressman has also secured federal funding.

RESTORING THE BRONX RIVER

Congressman Serrano has:

- ❑ Directed the Army Corps of Engineers to study river ecosystem restoration and obtained funding over several years for the study.
- ❑ Secured several million dollars in funding earmarks in support of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) land acquisition and restoration activities. In addition to restoring fishery habitats, conserving coastal land and establishing educational programs, these activities have made NOAA a full community partner.
- ❑ Obtained millions in Transportation funds over multiple fiscal years for the construction and extension of greenways along the river. These corridors of undeveloped land are reserved for recreational use or environmental preservation. The Soundview Greenway, when completed, will span the Soundview Park segment of the River. The funds also will extend the rest of the Bronx River Greenway through the cement plant site and from Bruckner Boulevard to Hunts Point Riverside Park.

BRONX AIR QUALITY

Statistics on respiratory illnesses in the Bronx speak for themselves. New Yorkers overall suffer from the worst rates of asthma in the country, with over 10 percent of schoolchildren and over 6 percent of the total population afflicted by the respiratory disease. The numbers are even worse in the Sixteenth Congressional District. South Bronx children are hospitalized for asthma at a rate 250 percent higher than children in the rest of New York City, and 1000 percent higher than other children in New York State.

“[O]ur communities continue to breathe foul air and continue to sicken and die from respiratory illness.”

José E. Serrano, *Congressional Record*, 24 Feb. 1998.

In explaining the causes of these alarming statistics, public health officials have sometimes shifted their focus onto factors other than air

quality, such as emotional stress and genetic susceptibility. But as this epidemic continues to inflict death and distress on New Yorkers and Bronx residents, such explanations can be insufficient and even dangerous, as they divert attention from air quality problems that these officials are able to address.

The origins of foul air are ubiquitous in the Bronx. The borough serves as a major center of industrial activity, and hosts a disproportionate share of the waste transfer stations in New York City. Closely linked to these activities is the omnipresence of diesel trucks, which create some of the highest volumes of vehicular traffic in the city. Studies have established the link between the pollution from these trucks and increased incidence of severe asthma attacks.

Addressing these air quality problems is especially urgent for low income communities, in which the combination of badly polluted air and poor access to health care can be devastating. Asthma, for example, is the number one cause of student absenteeism in New York City schools, and South Bronx residents also cope with abnormally high rates of other respiratory illness, infant mortality and immune deficiency.

In response to these ongoing difficulties, Congressman Serrano has worked to raise awareness about air pollution and secured federal funding for studies and programs related to air pollution abatement in the Bronx. At times his advocacy has met with resistance from federal agencies, but his persistence has resulted in a strong start to efforts that will lead to cleaner air for all Bronx residents.

SUPPORTING NEW RESEARCH ON AIR QUALITY

Congressman Serrano has secured

- ❑ Millions in Environmental Protection Agency funds over multiple years for New York University to conduct the **South Bronx Environmental Health and Policy Study**. With cooperation from the local community, the study analyzes the environmental and public health effects associated with living near pollution sources. Among other findings, the study has confirmed that high volumes of vehicular traffic expose South Bronx residents to more air pollutants, compared to other residents of New York City.
- ❑ Appropriations from multiple years for the **Strategic Greening Study**, conducted by the Agriculture Department in cooperation with the Cornell University Extension Service, the U.S. Forest Service and the community. The urban silviculture research project studies how different trees and plants can offset the health effects of severe air pollution.

PARKS IN THE BRONX

The scarcity of green space in our urban setting imparts ever more importance to our conservation of the small amount that is available. When properly managed, these small pockets of nature can help to revitalize neighborhoods. Improvements to parks can attract residents, businesses and visitors that can all reinvigorate local economies. And most importantly, good parks provide safe and clean settings where children can play, enjoy the wonders of nature and participate in programmed activities.



At a park in the Sixteenth Congressional District, Congressman Serrano meets with volunteers participating in a federally-funded greening study to discuss the effects of trees on air quality.

Parks, however, are not alone a panacea for urban problems; the key to unlocking their benefits lies in their proper management. Just as healthy, well-managed parks can attract growth to an area, poorly maintained and abandoned parks not only harm the fabric of the neighborhood, but also deter potential residential and commercial developers.

For these reasons, Congressman Serrano has labored tirelessly to improve the condition of parks in the Bronx and prevent additional parks from falling into disrepair. He has also sought funds for projects to improve parks and make their resources available to a wider range of residents.

Through these efforts, and with the help of community leaders and other members of the New York Congressional Delegation, Serrano has helped to ensure that these parks continue to serve their vital role as centers of recreational life for Bronx residents.

IMPROVING PARKS

Congressman Serrano has obtained

- ❑ Millions of dollars in federal funding for the Army Corps of Engineers to study, design and reconstruct the shoreline of Orchard Beach, which had been plagued by severe erosion. The beach receives over two million visitors each year, many of them low-income and minority.
- ❑ Funding over multiple years for the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation to restore Joyce Kilmer Park. Since 1999, federal funds for the project have repaired the park's landscaping, constructed sidewalks and curbs, added perimeter fencing and installed additional trash cans, bollards and benches.
- ❑ Funds for the development of a river house in Starlight Park, which would bring local residents back to the park to take full advantage of the recreational potential of its location on the Bronx River.
- ❑ Funding for improvements at Crotona Park. These projects have included renovation and restoration of the historic Bath House as well as funding for the Crotona Nature Center.
- ❑ Funding for the design and construction of the first phase of a greenway along the shore of the Harlem River in the Bronx, reclaiming it for public use. This greenway will create a waterfront bicycle and pedestrian route from Yankee Stadium to the Kingsbridge neighborhood.
- ❑ Funding for the City Parks Foundation's programs in the Bronx, which provide programs for at-risk youth in public parks, helping to build positive ties between kids and their local parks.

THE BRONX AND BEYOND

Recognizing the interrelationships between the environmental problems of the world and those of his Congressional District, Congressman Serrano has been a strong advocate for projects and initiatives whose reach extend beyond the Bronx.

LOOKING OUTWARD

Congressman Serrano has

- ❑ Authored legislation to provide tax credits for businesses in EPA-designated “nonattainment areas” that convert to clean fuel vehicle technologies.
- ❑ Obtained Energy Department research funds for the development of the Center for Sustainable Energy Options at Bronx Community College. The Center promotes the development and use of alternative fuel technologies.
- ❑ Supported full funding for the Agriculture Department’s Urban Resources Partnership. In the Bronx, the program funded walkways and gardens in previously abandoned spaces.
- ❑ Supported full funding for climate modeling research by the International Research Institute for Climate Prediction at Columbia University.
- ❑ Obtained funding for the Wildlife Conservation Society in the Bronx. These funds supported the development of the Conservation Institute and the Fund for the Improvement of Education.
- ❑ Supported full funding for Global Learning and Observations to Benefit the Environment (GLOBE), a program that sponsors science training for teachers.
- ❑ Obtained funding over multiple years for coral reef monitoring in Puerto Rico.
- ❑ Directed the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Agency to assist in the restoration of Vieques, and secured funding for this purpose.

Congressman José E. Serrano has represented the Bronx in the U.S. House of Representatives since 1990. He is Ranking Minority Member of the Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, State and the Judiciary of the House Appropriations Committee, as well as a senior member of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security.



CONGRESSMAN JOSÉ E. SERRANO (16-NY)

Bronx Office

788 Southern Boulevard
Bronx, New York 10455-2115
(718) 620-0084

Washington, D.C. Office

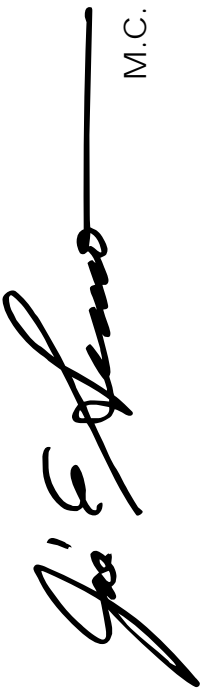
2227 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515-3216
(202) 225-4361

<http://www.house.gov/serrano>

jserrano@mail.house.gov

CONGRESSMAN JOSÉ E. SERRANO

2227 RAYBURN HOB
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-3216



M.C.