

# Arizona Daily Star

## Mayor Rothschild: City parks need our financial support

By Jonathan Rothschild Special to the Arizona Daily Star  
August 30, 2016



This Labor Day, many families will celebrate the last holiday weekend of the summer in parks — local, state and national.

Aug. 25 marked the centennial of the National Park System, and I hope everyone makes time to visit a national park this year, especially because Tucson is blessed to have Saguaro National Park on both sides of town. Catalina State Park is also close by, in the Coronado National Forest.

We visit national and state parks for their camping, hiking and wilderness — to make memories and to get away from daily life. City parks are different. At their best, they're a part of daily life — a place to picnic and enjoy outdoor sports, playgrounds and activities. We may not remember every trip our family took to the pool in a city park, but we remember the fun we had there and the thrill of learning to swim.

Parks add a great deal to quality of life. That's why I'll be working to make sure we include city parks in any revenue proposal we put before voters.

During the recession, city parks took some of the deepest cuts. Pools were closed. Programs were cut. Investment in facilities and equipment was delayed.

Now, we need to rebuild — literally, in some cases. Despite the success of Bring Back the Splash! and other private donations to the Tucson Parks Foundation, some city pools remain closed.

Making our parks thrive again is primarily a city responsibility, and we'll be approaching it as such. But our federal partners also need to step up.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund was created by Congress to support parks at the local, state and national level with fees from offshore drilling. Tucson city parks have received more than \$7.2 million in grants from the fund.

Unfortunately, Congress failed to reauthorize the fund beyond a short-term extension, nor has the program been fully funded for many years now.

That's why I've joined a bipartisan coalition, Mayors for Parks, to ask Congress for permanent reauthorization and full funding of the land and water fund. I encourage anyone who cares about parks to contact their federal representatives and ask them to do the same.

Even with that federal program at full funding, however, we'll still need to seek additional revenue to bring city parks up to par, whether that's through sales tax or another funding mechanism.

In Tucson, we've learned not to count on other levels of government to take care of local needs.

After years of the state sweeping HURF funds intended for local road repair, the city passed a streets bond that let us fix many of our major arterial streets ourselves.

We still have a ways to go to address the years of delayed investment in roads, parks, facilities and equipment. But we know what we need to do, and it's not wait for others to help us.

When we take on issues ourselves, as a city — whether it's roads, downtown development, or bringing high school dropouts back to graduate — we see results. We've seen them with the streets bond. Success builds on success as we look forward to the next challenge.

Enjoy the parks this holiday weekend. Let's make the commitment to invest and make them even better — for future holidays, and every day.

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