



Image courtesy of the Member

Albio Sires

1951–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE 2006–
DEMOCRAT FROM NEW JERSEY

“I am in a good position for New Jersey and my district,” Albio Sires told a Newark reporter in 2009. With seats on powerful committees overseeing the interests of his busy upstate district, Sires has been able to champion transportation and immigration issues that hit close to home. As he said, “You’re always trying to help your constituents.”¹

Albio Sires was born on January 26, 1951, in Bejucal, Cuba. His family fled Fidel Castro’s government in 1962 and settled in West New York, New Jersey, where his parents, who had a grade school education, worked in the factories. He graduated from West New York’s Memorial High School in 1970 and earned a bachelor’s degree from St. Peter’s College in Jersey City in 1974. Sires returned to his old high school to teach Spanish and English as a Second Language, coaching the basketball team after classes. In 1985 Sires received a master’s degree in Spanish from Middlebury College in Vermont. He is married to Adrienne Sires and has a stepdaughter, Tara Kole.²

In his first bid for public office, Sires ran as a Democrat for mayor of West New York in 1983, losing to longtime incumbent Anthony DeFino. Three years later he ran as a Republican for New Jersey’s 14th U.S. Congressional District seat held by Democrat Frank J. Guarini, Jr. Sires lost that year, but New Jersey Governor Thomas Kean soon hired him to improve the communication between his administration and the Hispanic community. Sires eventually opened an insurance company, before running unsuccessfully for the West New York Town Commission in 1991 and 1993.³

In 1995 DeFino retired, and Sires again ran for mayor of West New York—this time as an Independent—and won. He served three terms in city hall (1995–2006), where he worked to spur residential and commercial investment while opening access to affordable housing.⁴ In 1999 Sires re-registered as a Democrat and, while serving as mayor, ran as a Democrat for a seat in the New Jersey assembly, defeating the incumbent candidate in the primary before easily winning the general election that fall. He served as speaker of the assembly from 2002 until 2006—the first Hispanic official to hold the position—where he worked to increase access to higher education for New Jersey students and to bolster homeland security in the wake of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001.⁵

When U.S. Representative Robert Menendez was appointed to the Senate after Jon S. Corzine resigned in 2006, Sires announced his candidacy to fill the

vacancy in the House. New Jersey's majority-Hispanic 13th District is a thin stretch of the Garden State that runs north-south from Perth Amboy to North Bergen, reaching inland toward Newark, and is separated from Manhattan by the Hudson River. Sires defeated the mayor of Perth Amboy in the primary election and ran uncontested in the special election. With 77.5 percent of the vote, he was simultaneously elected to the remainder of the 109th Congress (2005–2007) and defeated his GOP challenger for the full term in the 110th Congress (2007–2009). In the 2008 and 2010 elections, Sires captured approximately 75 percent of the vote.⁶

In Congress, Sires has served on three committees: Financial Services (110th Congress, 2007–2009), Foreign Affairs (110th–112th Congresses, 2007–2013), and Transportation and Infrastructure (110th–112th Congresses). He left Financial Services to sit on Transportation and Infrastructure during the second session of the 110th Congress. Since Sires's district is a transportation hub, he has used his seat on the committee to push for improvements to ports, rail lines, and roads, including a new tunnel under the Hudson River to connect New Jersey to Manhattan.⁷ On Foreign Affairs, Sires has worked with Members of Cuban descent on both sides of the aisle, fighting legislation that seeks to ease travel and trade restrictions on Cuba.⁸ In addition to his committee duties, Sires has been an active member of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC), the Congressional Urban Caucus, and the Democratic Caucus's Livable Communities Task Force. Also, at the start of the 111th Congress (2009–2011), he was named a vice chairman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee.⁹

FOR FURTHER READING

Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, "Albio Sires," <http://bioguide.congress.gov>.

NOTES

- 1 As quoted in Bob Braun, "Finding His Niche in a Complex Capitol," 22 February 2009, *Star-Ledger* (Newark, NJ): 1.
- 2 Jeff Whelan, "The Next Speaker Is a Proven Survivor," 18 November 2001, *Star-Ledger*: 25; "Albio Sires," *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov>.
- 3 Whelan, "The Next Speaker Is a Proven Survivor"; *Politics in America*, 2012 (Washington, D.C.: CQ-Roll Call, Inc., 2011): 642.

- 4 "Official Biography of Congressman Albio Sires," <http://sires.house.gov/about-albio/biography> (accessed 7 June 2012).
- 5 Barbara Fitzgerald, "After a Slow Climb, Hispanics Gather Power," 20 January 2002, *New York Times*: 10; Whelan, "The Next Speaker Is a Proven Survivor"; Ron Marsico and David Kinney, "Sires Wins Assembly Battle for Speaker," 17 November 2001, *Star-Ledger*: 1; Eugene Kiely and Suzette Parmley, "Democrats Take Control in Trenton," 9 January 2002, *Philadelphia Inquirer*: A1; "Official Biography of Congressman Albio Sires," <http://sires.house.gov/about-albio/biography> (accessed 7 June 2012).
- 6 Rudy Larini, "13th District Vacancy Is One for History Books," 5 November 2006, *Star-Ledger*: 50; *Politics in America*, 2012: 643; "Election Statistics, 1920 to Present," <http://history.house.gov/institution/election-statistics/election-statistics>.
- 7 Kimberly Geiger, "Congress in Transition: Conservatives, Moderates Dominate Freshman Class," 23 November 2006, *San Francisco Chronicle*: A17.
- 8 Pablo Bachelet, "Battle on Cuba Policy Heats Up," 5 March 2007, *Miami Herald*: A1; Raju Chebium Gannett, "Menendez, Sires Oppose Effort to Lift Travel Ban to Cuba," 5 April 2009, *Daily Record* (Morristown, NJ): 2; Robert Burns, "Obama Removes Barriers for Cuban Americans," 14 April 2009, *Star-Ledger*: 1; *Politics in America*, 2012: 642–643.
- 9 *Politics in America*, 2012: 642–643; "Official Biography of Congressman Albio Sires," <http://sires.house.gov/about-albio/biography> (accessed 7 June 2012).