

Q&A: Rep. Ron Kind on Healthy Kids Outdoors Act

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Representative [Ron Kind](#) (WI), alongside Senator [Mark Udall](#) (CO), recently introduced the [Healthy Kids Outdoors Act](#). This bill would authorize the [Secretary of the Interior](#) to carry out programs and activities that connect Americans, especially children, youth, and families, with the outdoors. We asked Rep. Kind to tell us a bit more about the act, as well as how its intention relate to the goals of the green schools movement.

As an elected official and community advocate, you've long worked to protect and preserve our natural resources. You also have a strong personal commitment to physical activity and a leadership role in the Congressional Fitness Caucus. How have trends around outdoor activity changed in recent years?

Trends around outdoor activity have change significantly in recent years, particularly among our youth. Today, kids spend a majority of their time inside, plugged in playing video games or watching TV. Studies show that children spend less time outside today than at any other point in history. Kids spend half as much time outdoors as they did 20 years ago and on average 7.5 hours a day in front of electronic media. When it comes to outdoor play, children devote only 4-7 minutes each day to outdoor activity.

These statistics point toward a huge shift in the way kids "play." It is resulting in increased obesity rates and a lack of a connection with the outdoors and nature.

Congressman Kind being active outdoors, promoting healthy lifestyles with middle school kids.

Could you describe what the Healthy Kids Outdoors Act does and how you and others in Congress determined this was needed?

An avid outdoorsman, there is nothing I enjoy more than spending weekends out hunting with my two boys. Unfortunately, this legacy of outdoor recreation isn't being passed down to enough of the next generation. The pull of technology and busy nature of today's families has resulted in a lack of physical activity amongst our kids and children staying indoors to play - resulting in a lack of appreciation for the outdoors and nature.

This growing nature deficiency threatens the future of conservation in this country, is impacting obesity rates, and threatens our national defense. In order to reverse these trends, I thought it was important to introduce legislation that would facilitate and promote outdoor recreation in our communities. This legislation provides state-level incentives to develop 5-year state strategies to connect children, youth, and families with nature.

As you know, Wisconsin is a leader in the green schools movement. [Lake Mills Middle School](#) in Lake Mills, WI is a LEED Platinum school, and Wisconsin was also one of 34 states that signed up to participate in the pilot year of the Department of Education's [Green Ribbon Schools program](#). Tell us about the role of schools in promoting healthy lifestyles and how the Healthy Kids Outdoors Act can help in this effort.

Kids spend a majority of their time at school meaning that schools have to be a part of the equation in solving the obesity crisis. I have long advocated for an increased role for schools in assisting with this crisis, most notably with my [Fitness Integrated with Teaching \(FIT\) Kids Act](#), H.R. 1057. This bill will work to get physical education back into schools. The Healthy Kids Outdoors Act can also provide schools with a role. The 5-year state strategies can include the upgrade of playground equipment or the addition of trails around schools, including recreation trails for students to walk and bike to school. In addition, these tools can be used during physical education class to get kids active while teaching them the importance of being active outdoors and enjoying nature.

In addition to the Healthy Kids Outdoors Act, what else will it take to end the childhood obesity epidemic?

It has to be a combination of factors, there is no silver bullet. And it can't be a top down approach from the federal government. It has to be a combination of incentives, greater family awareness, and work from community-based organizations that will help get this problem in check.

This is why I introduced the Healthy CHOICES Act during the last Congress. This bill was the first of its kind to work to comprehensively address the obesity epidemic. There are so many different areas that need to be the focus in order for us to get this problem under control that it requires work on many different levels and from many different facets. Everyone has a role to play, and passing initiatives like the Healthy Kids Outdoors Act, the FIT Kids Act, and initiatives included in the Healthy CHOICES Act will help facilitate change where it needs to happen first, at the family and local level.

How do you respond to people who question whether Congress should be involved with issues like this in light of other competing national priorities?

This issue is extremely important and should be a priority, because it affects so many other things happening in the national debate right now. Health care costs are the single largest factor impacting deficits in this country. If we don't get obesity under control, chronic health problems later in life will continue to cost the system billions of dollars each year. A lack of interest in the outdoors can also lead to a decline in the outdoor retail industry, which could seriously harm a major economic presence in rural America. Also, our military readiness is declining. Nearly one in four applicants for the military is rejected for being overweight or obese. This is why Congress has should be working to not only increase physical activity among our children but facilitate and promote outdoor recreation.

What can students, parents, educators and community advocates do to support the efforts to promote outdoor activity and pass the Healthy Kids Outdoors Act?

Grassroots support is crucial for a bill such as this. The more that people contact their representatives and let them know the importance of this legislation, the greater the chance that the member will pay attention to the cause and sponsor the bill. Gaining support and continued attention will give this bill the

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