

News from Senator

BOB DOLE



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
FRIDAY, JULY 29, 1983

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DOLE INTRODUCES HOSTAGE RELIEF ACT

WASHINGTON -- Senate Finance Committee Chairman Bob Dole (R-Kan.) has introduced legislation to authorize payments of medical expenses, special tax allowances, and detention benefits for American hostages and their families. Senator Dole introduced the measure at the request of President Reagan.

"The Hostage Relief Act of 1983" makes permanent many of the provisions of the Hostage Relief Act of 1980, which was a temporary measure designed to provide immediate financial relief to the families of the individuals then held hostage in Iran. The Act as passed was deliberately made temporary with the suggestion that a committee be appointed to study and make recommendations on appropriate permanent legislation to provide relief for U.S. hostages and their families. Accordingly, the President's Commission on Hostage Compensation was created by executive order on January 19, 1981. One of the recommendations of the Commission was that the Hostage Relief Act of 1980 be made permanent and that it be amended to apply to future hostage situations.

"The suffering of the hostages in Iran and their families served to highlight for us the risks and sacrifices of those military and civilian employees who serve this country abroad," said Senator Dole. "Fortunately a hostage situation like the one involving Iran is an unusual one. However, we are all too aware of the growth of terrorist activities throughout the world in recent years, of which the recent bombing attack on the U.S. embassy in Beirut is an example."

The Hostage Relief Act of 1983 would authorize (but not require) payments of medical expenses and limited VA-type educational expenses for American hostages and their families. The medical and educational expenses are authorized only to the extent that the agency employing the hostage does not currently pay such expenses. The bill would also allow the filing of a joint income tax return by a hostage's spouse, and the postponement of certain tax deadlines and civil actions. A special savings fund for the deposit of the portion of a hostage's pay not needed by dependents would be required. These provisions would generally be applicable only to federal civilian and military personnel, although the deferral of tax deadlines and stay of civil actions would apply to any individual taken hostage in an action directed against the United States.

The bill also authorizes payment of a detention benefit of \$10.50 per day to the hostages detained during the Iranian crisis. This amount was based in part on the recommendation of the President's Commission on Hostage Compensation with assistance from the State Department, Defense Department and OMB. This bill would allow the President to authorize special detention benefits for future hostages.

The agencies that employ the hostages will pay the cost of the benefits, including the detention benefit, out of their operating funds.

"It is hoped that, through this Act, the agencies employing citizens who serve abroad will be better able to serve those employees who, in turn, have provided an incomparable service to this Nation and its citizens," said Dole.