

Bob Dole



NEWS

U. S. SENATOR FOR KANSAS

FROM:

SENATE REPUBLICAN LEADER

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CALIFORNIA ARSON

DOLE AMENDMENT TO CRIME BILL INCREASES FEDERAL PENALTIES FOR ARSON

During the past several days, much of America has sat transfixed before their television sets, watching in horror as fires have engulfed entire communities in southern California. Our prayers go out to the families who have lost their homes and their property.

News reports now suggest that some of the fires were set intentionally by arsonists. No doubt about it, arson is one of the most malicious and cowardly acts of violence that anyone can commit...at any time, anywhere.

Arson In California

And in California, arson continues to be a major problem, causing hundreds of injuries and deaths among fire fighters and civilians, and leading to millions of dollars in property loss.

According to the California State Fire Marshal, the total number of fire-related incidents in California declined from 1981 to 1991, dropping by nearly 50,000. But, during the same period, the number of arson crimes as a percentage of total fire-related incidents, has risen steadily.

Supplement Work of Governor Wilson

Governor Pete Wilson has responded quickly to this latest disaster, assisting in the relief effort and proposing to amend the California state criminal code to increase the penalties for arson. It is my hope that Governor Wilson will succeed in persuading the California state legislature to join in this worthwhile effort.

The amendment I am offering today will supplement the work of Governor Wilson by increasing the penalties for arson at the federal level. It recognizes that the punishment must fit the crime...for there are few crimes as despicable as arson, and few criminals as vicious as the arsonist.

Boost Federal Penalties for Arson

Under federal law, any person who destroys--by fire--property used in, or affecting, interstate commerce is subject to a maximum penalty of ten years' imprisonment and a fine of not more than \$10,000. And if the arson causes injury to any person, or any public safety officer fighting the flames spawned by the arson, then the maximum penalty is twenty years' imprisonment and a fine of \$20,000.

This amendment would double the maximum prison term for arson affecting interstate commerce to 20 years, and would allow the imposition of a fine equalling either the value of the property destroyed or \$100,000, whichever is greater. The amendment would also double the maximum prison term for arson that results in injury to a person--raising the maximum term of imprisonment to 40 years, and increasing the maximum fine to an amount equalling the value of the property destroyed or \$200,000, whichever is greater.

Destruction of Federal Property

Some of the property that has been destroyed is owned by the U.S. Forest Service, including land in the Angeles National Forest and the Cleveland national forest. Other property that has been irreparably damaged is owned by state, local, and county governments that receive federal assistance.

As a result, my amendment would also increase the federal penalties for anyone who damages--by fire--any property owned by, or leased to, any agency of the United States or owned by, or

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leased to, any organization receiving federal financial assistance. If this amendment were signed into the law, the new maximum penalties for this crime would be 20 years' imprisonment and a fine equalling either the value of the property destroyed or \$100,000, whichever is greater. The maximum penalty would increase to 40 years' imprisonment and a \$200,000 fine if someone were injured as a result of the arson.

No legislation can ever repair the damage that has been done to the citizens of southern California. No amendment can rebuild a home or restore a family's lost possessions.

But government can demand accountability for those who have committed these malicious crimes. Governor Wilson has acted, and it's time for the Senate to act as well.

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