

Bob Dole



NEWS

U.S. SENATOR FOR KANSAS

FROM:

SENATE MAJORITY LEADER

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LEGAL REFORM

DOLE URGES NECESSARY TORT REFORM TO ADDRESS RUNAWAY PUNITIVE DAMAGE AWARDS; CALLS TRIAL LAWYERS OUT OF STEP WITH MOST AMERICANS

I want to congratulate the House of Representatives on passing the last of its legal reform packages. This bill is an important step forward that would ensure that the outrageous aspects of America's legal system are reformed while protecting people who have been harmed by someone else's wrongful or careless conduct. It is an important victory for all Americans.

I especially commend the House on its success in extending the protections against runaway punitive damage awards to all Americans. Punitive damage awards in recent years have skyrocketed beyond any sane goal of compensation or deterrence. Instead, they have turned our legal system into one big lottery. Runaway punitive damage awards are undermining the American people's faith in the bedrock principles that underlie our legal system -- justice and fairness.

Our liability rules -- and often just the risk of devastating damage awards -- impose huge costs on American society without advancing the goal of compensating those who are truly victims.

Because of the risks of huge damage awards even without fault, playgrounds close. Boy Scout troops disband. Doctors practice defensive medicine and drive up the costs of health care. Life-saving drugs are withheld from the marketplace. Volunteers and charities stop helping others because they fear the consequences.

This must stop. Reforming our legal system is about more than rules -- it is about our culture. A system that encourages everyone to be a victim encourages more than too many lawsuits. It undermines the sense of personal responsibility that is the necessary fabric of a free society. That is why tort reform is so necessary.

I've seen reports that the trial lawyers who feed off the system that is out of control will spend more than \$20 million to fight reform. The trial lawyers are out of step with most Americans. The trial lawyers can spend all the money they want -
- we intend to wage and win a vigorous fight on behalf of all
Americans who believe in a legal system that is just and fair.

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