

Bob Dole



NEWS

U.S. SENATOR FOR KANSAS

FROM:

SENATE MAJORITY LEADER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Wednesday, May 10, 1995

Contact: Clarkson Hine
(202) 224-5358

PRODUCT LIABILITY REFORM

**SENATE TAKES "DRAMATIC STEP FORWARD" - OVERWHELMINGLY PASSES
MEANINGFUL PRODUCT LIABILITY BILL;
IMPORTANT VICTORY FOR COMMON SENSE & AMERICAN PEOPLE**

After two weeks of debate, the Senate has today taken a dramatic step forward. A product liability bill has been introduced in every Congress for the last decade. In most cases, however, proponents could not even muster the votes to consider this legislation on the floor.

Passage of the product liability bill today is thus an important victory for common sense and the American people.

Stronger Bill Includes Small Business Protections

It is also important to note that we have just passed a bill that is stronger than bills introduced in previous years, and stronger because of the efforts of some of our members on the floor that added small business protections.

In that regard, I want to pay tribute to our newest members, who as a group, provided energy, ideas and determination in this debate. Senators Snowe and Dewine made a significant contribution that allowed us to obtain meaningful protection from abusive punitive damages while protecting small businesses.

And Senators Abraham and Kyl responded to the call of the American people in last year's elections by their efforts to expand these protections to include volunteer and charitable organizations and to add needed civil justice reforms. Together with Senators Kassebaum and McConnell, who introduced medical malpractice reforms, they produced something never before seen on the Senate floor: clear majorities for broader reform.

For various reasons, we couldn't get 60 votes to bring debate to a close on these broader reforms, but I'm glad we had a chance to debate them, because the problems that exist haven't gone away.

Just three days ago, I received a letter from the head of the Boy Scouts of America, Mr. Jere Ratcliffe. In just the second line of his letter, Mr. Ratcliffe says something that ought to cause all of us to pause, and I quote:

"The civil justice system, as it now exists, has consequences which work a chilling effect on our willingness and ability to continue to pursue activities that are beneficial to all of us . . . This is particularly so in the case of volunteer service organizations."

Now, we've heard from the trial lawyers. They say everything is fine. But volunteer organizations great and small tell us a different story. So, as much as we've made great strides today -- and we have -- there is more to do.

Commitment to Revisit Health Care Liability Bill

Thus, for example, I hope to bring to the floor the McConnell-Lieberman-Kassebaum health care liability bill later this year. This amendment was added to the product liability bill by a 53-47 vote. In addition, some senators who support medical malpractice reforms but voted against that amendment last week, apparently did so because they wanted to pursue a products-only bill. This legislation deserves serious consideration on its own merits.

I once again want to congratulate the Senate for passing this important legislation.

###

*Remarks delivered on Senate floor at approximately 12:30 p.m.