

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: August 31, 2015

CONTACT: Betsey Hodges at (916) 651-4001 (office), (916) 207-2600 (cell),
betsey.hodges@sen.ca.gov

SENATOR GAINES' BILL TO KEEP DRONES OUT OF EMERGENCY ZONES PASSES THE SENATE

Senate Bill 168 receives unanimous, bipartisan support

SACRAMENTO – Senator Ted Gaines (R-El Dorado) today announced his Senate Bill 168, which would protect forests, property and the lives of citizens, firefighters and emergency personnel from drone interference, passed out of the Senate and is now headed to the Assembly.

“To think that someone would interfere with firefighting or emergency response situations to get a sneak peek or to post a drone video on YouTube is an outrage that is deserving of punishment and condemnation,” said Senator Gaines. “I’m pleased that my colleagues agreed, and I look forward to Senate Bill 168’s continued support as it makes its way through the Assembly.”

Senate Bill 168 will increase fines for drone use that interferes with firefighting and emergency responders. The bill also seeks to grant civil immunity to any emergency responder who damages an unmanned aircraft in the course of firefighting, air ambulance, or search-and-rescue operations. The bill stems from alarming reports of private, unauthorized drones causing mission-critical aircraft to be grounded during firefighting and medical response operations, putting pilots, firefighters, civilians and property at unnecessary risk.

Senator Gaines believes drones hold great promise for wildfire suppression and other emergency services when used properly by the appropriate agencies, but does not want rogue drones to interfere with the most effective response to time-sensitive crises.

“First, I want everyone to know that flying drones in these areas is dangerous and wrong. Let’s get the word out as far and wide as we can – immediately – to help keep our people and emergency personnel safe,” said Senator Gaines. “But this penalty will help ensure our skies are safe. People can replace drones, but we can’t replace a life. Public safety should be our absolute number one priority.”

Senator Ted Gaines represents the 1st Senate District, which includes all or parts of Alpine, El Dorado, Lassen, Modoc, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Sacramento, Shasta, Sierra and Siskiyou counties.

###