

# Opinion: Drone use needs to be regulated

By Ted Gaines

Technology's miraculous leaps forward bring unimaginable benefits to us all. Life-saving medical procedures, limitless entertainment options, wealth building productivity tools and more change our lives for the better. But as with all tools, their benefit – or harm – depends on the intent of the user. That is why this legislative session I'm paying special attention to the drone revolution and pushing bills to enhance public safety.

The federal government is acting as well, creating “no drone zones” and tasking the Federal Aviation Administration with creating regulations on drone use, but the possibilities for abuse are unlimited and we need to take state-level action now. Would you want someone to hover a drone around your children's locker room or bathroom and take pictures of them to post on the internet? What about an ex-spouse or potential abductor drone-monitoring the patterns of your children for some harmful purpose? What about a using a drone to gather information for some deadly, Columbine-style school attack?



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It's not paranoia to imagine these terrible scenarios, it's just an understanding that technology can serve as an enabler for the best and worst purposes.

Schools should be sanctuaries for our children, and to protect students on campus, my Senate Bill 271 makes it a crime to use a drone to capture images of schools, and the students who use them, during school hours or during extracurricular activities.

Nowadays, drones also offer a new avenue for smuggling dangerous materials into prisons that threaten guards, prisoners, and citizens outside the jailhouse walls.

Last spring, the *New York Times* reported a small drone getting tangled up in the power lines outside of a prison in South Carolina. When they investigated, they found the drone had carried marijuana, a cell phone, and other contraband intended for prisoners inside the walls.

Cell phones let criminals project their power out on the streets in secret, facilitating the operation of gangs and other criminal enterprises. Weapons are an obvious problem for officer and inmate safety, and their proliferation is guaranteed if drone smuggling becomes commonplace. With drone delivery, prisoners would graduate from already dangerous sharpened bits of metal or plastic to far deadlier weapons that would put more people at risk.

Some companies are working to embed “no fly zones” into their drones, and there may be other mechanisms for controlling them, but even then, enterprising criminals may overcome those defenses in the perpetual cat-and-mouse game played between crooks and public safety. My Senate Bill 170 will make it illegal to fly a drone over a prison or jail. If we can’t stop drone smuggling, we can at least tack on extra punishment for those who would put so many lives at risk.

For next year, I’m already looking at “drone-stalking” bills and tackling the issue of drones and restraining orders, and I want to hear from my constituents, public safety, victims groups and civil libertarians to understand their ideas for

how to deal with this changing landscape.

Computers once used vacuum tubes and filled up rooms the size of gymnasiums. Now we pack chips with circuits measured in nanometers and carry mini-PCs around in our pockets. Drones and other technologies will follow the same path, and as they become cheaper, better and ever more ubiquitous, it's important that we regulate them in a way that preserves our safety and privacy while preserving our freedom. It's not always an easy balance. But my two drone bills protect children and public safety and are an excellent start.

*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.*