

# Opinion: The importance of protecting K9s

By Ted Gaines

Orange police chased hit-and-run suspect Steve Montee for three hours before his truck ran out of gas, but the drama did not end there. Montee refused to exit his vehicle. For two more hours, the officers negotiated and offered Montee opportunities to surrender. They shot pepper spray into his truck cabin, but Montee would not budge and the standoff was moving toward a dangerous and volatile resolution. But the officers had one more card to play, and they dispatched a highly-trained, highly-effective police asset named Bosco to rescue the day.



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Bosco ran forward alone and incapacitated the suspect so the officers could move in safely and arrest the driver. Bosco, the hero of the encounter, is a dog.

It's because of dogs such as Bosco that I have introduced the Police Dog Protection Act of 2018. Under current law, harming a police dog is what's called a "wobbler," meaning it's a crime that can be charged as either a felony or misdemeanor. My bill will automatically make it a felony – every time – for anyone who willfully and maliciously harms or kills one of these law dogs.

Police dogs, usually German shepherds or Belgian malinois, can cost departments upward of \$10,000 to purchase and put into service, and continuing health, upkeep, and training can run as much as \$100,000 over the course of their service lives. The investment pays off.

These dogs are deployed in hundreds of law enforcement agencies around the state. They protect their handlers – just ask Montee – but also search for drugs and explosives, locate missing persons, and find crime scene evidence. Their amazing sense of smell, 10,000 times more powerful than a human's, coupled with intense training, makes them a unique weapon in the fight to keep our neighborhoods safe.

Dogs and their handlers also visit schools and community groups throughout the year, demonstrating their expertise and special skills, and in the process build healthy bonds between officers and the people they protect and serve. They are vital community outreach tools.

Sadly, at least 10 of these K-9s died in the line of duty over the past five years in California. That's 10 too many. And at a time when prison "realignment," Proposition 47 and Proposition 57 are flooding our neighborhoods with criminals who should still be behind bars, our officers need all the help and support they can get.

These are extraordinary animals playing a special role in our society, but it also comes down to this: An attack on any part of law enforcement is an attack on every part of law enforcement. We need to drop the hammer on anyone who tries to hurt those who are protecting us all.

My Police Dog Protection Act will do just that.

*State Sen. 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.*