

STATEMENT OF
RAY A. BARNHART
BEFORE THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS
CONFIRMATION HEARING AS ADMINISTRATOR
OF THE
FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION
FEBRUARY 4, 1981

Good morning Mr. Chairman, members of this committee. I am honored to appear before you today as President Reagan's nominee as Administrator of the Federal Highway Administration, and I wish, for the record, to sincerely express my appreciation to him and to Secretary Drew Lewis for their confidence in recommending me to this position in what I genuinely believe to be one of the finest agencies of Federal Government.

As a just-resigned commissioner of a State transportation agency, I frankly acknowledge to you that if recommended by this Committee, and confirmed by the Senate, during my tenure I shall do everything within my power to impress upon this Administration and the American people how essential is an efficient and accessible transportation system. Mobility is something we Americans have grown to expect and accept often without being mindful of how dependent upon it we are.

Too often our highway programs have been, in the public mind, derided as pork-barrel type public works primarily benefiting contractors and material suppliers and heavy haulers. But my concern is not to pour concrete in strips on the ground to pave the countryside, but to provide a means whereby goods can be brought to market, factories can disperse their products, ports can expand our commerce, and people can move about freely.

In short, so that men and women can have access to diverse jobs and fuller lives, and sustain a standard of living unknown to most other nations of the world. The economic vitality of our country is dependent, not just upon the soundness of the American dollar, but upon the soundness of our transportation system. Not one farmer, blue collar worker, white collar worker, professional, rich or poor person fails to be in large measure dependent upon transportation. It is not a luxury but an essential. Such is true also in matters of national security, for the great Interstate Highway System was conceived as a basic element of our defense system--it still is! I mention these things not to lecture to you gentlemen, for several of you have been instrumental in formulating these programs and have done a great public service by it, but simply because others may be interested in these proceedings. I try never to miss an opportunity to promote those causes in which I believe.

I said earlier that I believe the FHWA is one of the finest agencies in the Federal Government. I believe that--I know that. I know too that within this department are men and women of great capacity, of concern, of talent--professionals. If confirmed as Federal Highway Administrator I intend to see that professional judgment is once again accorded the respect it merits.

This new Administration, the new Congress, and people in general are all acutely aware of the major difficulties now facing our Nation. A run-away economy--dependence upon foreign energy--the high cost of money--inflation--the endless pages of governmental regulations. In his inaugural address President Reagan said that economic ills came upon us over several decades

and they will not go away over night. However, he said, they will go away because we have the capacity to do what needs to be done. I would intend to follow that direction and work closely with Secretary Lewis, whose leadership I respect, and with the Administrators of the other transportation modes who jointly share responsibility for resolving our transportation problems. From the FHWA perspective existing programs now in effect will be closely analyzed and evaluated. Must we not then, redefine what is the Federal responsibility? If we accept the premise that the Federal-aid highway program was created to assist the states in constructing and improving roads that serve the national interest, have we not expanded the program beyond its proper Federal role when we finance, say, the curbing and guttering of city streets in a town in Texas? Is it in the national interest to delay a major project for years by mandating duplicatory studies at great expense when all the affected local governments and levels of government, cities, counties, states, have reached agreement? It is an unacceptable waste of public funds when the average time to start construction of a major project takes 7 years 3 months. From conception to contract, 7 years and 3 months! Multiply that time frame by the present rate of inflation and we see that we double the cost of every project before we turn a spade of dirt. We must, we shall, reduce the amount of time that it takes to make governmental decisions and we shall avoid intrusions by Federal Government into areas properly the business responsibility of the respective States.

I said that I respected the professional qualities of the men and women here within the FHWA. I must say too, that I am convinced that your individual States, with their departments of transportation, must be staffed

by men and women of no less capability. Professionals in State governments must be accorded greater latitude in the administration of their own funds-- for they must know far better than we, hundreds of miles away, how best to serve the needs of your citizens.

Serving as highway commissioner in Texas I have learned first hand the challenges which face a highway agency, and I am familiar with their operations. I recognize the strong Federal/State relationship which has existed over the past 60 years in administering the Federal-aid highway program. While most program authority has been delegated to the State division level, which is the main reason for the good relationship, increased redtape has frayed some edges in this association. I intend to mend those edges as I said earlier by reemphasizing the role of local authorities, consistent with our congressional charge. There is a need for government! Many directives by FHWA and DOT have, in fact, well served the public need. Additionally, we in FHWA have a congressional mandate to follow in protecting the Federal dollar and the interests of Federal Government. We shall do so.

One specific area I believe we all agree needs immediate attention is the preservation of the Interstate Highway System. Highways in this country account for 90 percent of all travel and some 40 percent of freight tonnage. By the end of this decade a major proportion of the Interstate will be worn out if present usage continues, and we know that it shall.

In examining an annual and growing expenditure of some \$8 billion plus of Federal funds for highways, I believe we must rethink the Federal mission and the traditional methods of funding. I suspect that certain construction projects now in planning stages may not meet the test of

economic feasibility. Certainly some new location investments will be necessary, but our efforts will be more and more focused upon preserving past investments and obtaining greater use out of existing facilities.

I consider programs such as those which provide for resurfacing, restoration, and rehabilitation, and hopefully reconstruction, of the Nation's highways, especially of the Interstate, of utmost importance, as is the problem of deficient bridges. Also, the numerous special interest or categorical programs must be consolidated and, in some cases, I believe responsibility for these programs should be returned to the States.

I have just begun to review the very crucial studies which the Department of Transportation has submitted pursuant to congressional mandate--the highway cost allocation study, the 1981 Interstate Cost Estimate and the Highway Needs Study, as well as the 1981 highway bill which the last administration drafted. If confirmed, I pledge to you that I shall work closely with you on the pressing issues that these documents address.

I thank you for your time, and I ask for your support and your confidence in confirming me as Federal Highway Administrator. I will work to aid the President, the Secretary, and this Congress, in carrying out the mandates of our fellow citizens--indeed of our Nation.