

STATEMENT OF RAYMOND A. PECK, JR., ADMINISTRATOR-DESIGNATE
NATIONAL HIGHWAY TRAFFIC SAFETY ADMINISTRATION, DEPARTMENT
OF TRANSPORTATION, BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE,
SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION, APRIL 1, 1981.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished members of the Senate Commerce Committee, it is an honor to appear before this Committee today to answer your questions concerning my nomination as Administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

With your permission, I would like to make a brief opening statement and then respond to questions.

The last three years have been a watershed in the domestic automobile industry. Falling sales, increasing costs, heightened foreign competition, and a generally soft economy have brought about a major redirection in the industry's production and marketing strategies. It is not a placid time to be nominated as head of a regulatory agency whose decisions can have significant effects on the performance of automobiles and on the cost of production.

I want to make it clear at the outset that I accepted the nomination because I believe that auto manufacturers and the supporting industries can and must consider safety as they develop the new generation of fuel efficient cars.

The overall regulatory framework established during the past fifteen years has influenced and has clearly enhanced the safety of motor vehicle travel in this country. I anticipate that most of that framework will be kept as we strive to achieve increased motoring safety in this nation.

This is not to say that NHTSA's regulatory program will be unchanged. I would intend, as Administrator, to keep a constant eye on the cost-effectiveness of our regulatory program. The economic circumstances under which this Administration takes office demand that this be done.

I fully subscribe to the sharp focus of this Administration on regulatory responsibility. I share the view that the federal government should regulate only where regulation can be shown to be cost-effective and there is no practicable alternative to such regulation.

Some of the regulations issued by the agency in the past may be found not to be effective under application of these criteria. These should and will be considered for revocation.

Some regulations that have been proposed may not be issued as final rules, on the same grounds.

I want to emphasize, however, Mr. Chairman, that I do not believe that the goals of this Administration demand or even support a view that the role of the federal government in promoting auto safety be eliminated. In reaffirming this general principle, I want to assure this Committee and the Congress that I am acutely aware of, and sensitive to, the difficulty and in some cases the impossibility of quantifying benefits where human health or safety is involved.

There will, I am sure, be questions which NHTSA must answer and decisions which I will be required to make, where strict cost-benefit analysis would not be appropriate. In such cases, my decisions will be based upon the goals of NHTSA and the mandates of the Congress to protect human life.

I can assure this Committee, Mr. Chairman, that I will not permit a relaxation of the auto safety vigilance of this agency, and I will do anything within my power to enhance those governmental efforts that will effectively and efficiently diminish the toll of accidents and injuries on our nation's highways.

This concludes my prepared statement. I would be glad to respond to your questions.