

Testimonies from U.S. Senate Committee on
Commerce, Science and Transportation Hearing

Panel 2 - Katherine S. Dalen

Katherine S. Dalen
Testimony to the US Senate Committee
On Commerce, Science, and Transportation

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I wish to thank Senator Gorton, Senator Murray, and the distinguished members of the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation for inviting me to speak today. My name is Katherine Dalen, and I am the parent of Stephen Tsiorvas who, at the age of ten, lost his life, along with two other sons of this community, in a devastating accident that was, like so many others, preventable.

When I decided to come and speak with you today, I puzzled over what it is I most wanted to say, what of all the things I feel, believe, and know were most important to relate to you. I wondered what words I could speak that would make the most impact and inspire change so that this tragedy would never be repeated, so that other lives would be saved. The first thing always on my mind is the depth of my sorrow and grief over Stephen's death and how much pain his loss has brought my family. I could go on about that for hours. I could tell you how sometimes the sadness tears our hearts apart and drowns our spirits. But our grief is personal, as would be yours had you lost a child by any means. My sadness, my family's suffering, can only serve to remind you how precious life is, how important it is that we love and protect our families, and how easy it is to lose those we love.

Additionally, I think I must speak to two issues. One, we need to take better care of our children, our loved ones, and our neighbors. We need to commit ourselves again to making human safety a priority. Most folks in Bellingham, many in Washington, and some throughout the nation realized again on June 10, 1999, how unexpectedly dangerous and deadly our neighborhoods can be. The price of one human life is too great a price to pay for such a reminder. How many times over how many years must the greed and sloth of industry be allowed to play deadly games with human lives? Is that to be our future as well? our children's children's future?

I need not remind this distinguished committee that our government was formed of the people, by the people, for the people. Our democracy was based on that principle, with a vision of the future very much on the minds of those drafting the rules for a balanced government. However, it does seem to me that we tend to live rather selfishly, with our individual lives and our individual pocketbooks in mind rather than the lives of our neighbors and the lives of those yet to be born. This selfishness seems especially evident in those situations in which we allow the fat corporate wolf to manage the fat company wolves who then manage the hens in the hen house with a corporate agenda. While some wolves may be fine fellows indeed, a wolf is by nature a wolf: his agenda is based more on filling his stomach than on the welfare of the chickens.

Two, our environment, our habitat, our earth cannot continue to be raped, either by accident or by deliberate intent, if we are to sustain human and animal life. If we erode our environment one small bit at a time, the human race will die. If not today, tomorrow. If not by fire, by ice. If not suddenly, then slowly. The pipeline that burst here, in this small city, has been in the ground for a long time; others will testify to that I'm sure. The quality of that pipe, and other pipes in this nation carrying volatile fuels, is in question, but the impact of yet another disaster is not. Each accident wreaks havoc on the lives of residents, the lives of native animals, and the land itself. Each accident causes this nation, our neighbors, our families, and our habitat irreparable damage. We know that toxic materials in our environment can poison us, leach into our food, pollute our drinking water, and hover in our air. And yet we continue to allow the wolves with a corporate agenda to manage not only the hens in the hen house but the hen house as well.

The size and growing complexity of our nation's needs does not abrogate our responsibility as citizens or as a government. Nor does the challenge demanded by that complexity allow us to simplify our solutions or grow lax in our diligence to monitor and enforce our regulations. The need for stern decisive action is abundantly clear. We can no longer hide from the fact that our behaviors and laissez faire policies have direct, detrimental effects on our future, and all futures to come-on us, on our children, and on our children's children. As a people, for the people, we must, **MUST**, protect those lives in our charge now, the lives of those yet unborn, and the land which sustains us only for so long as we care for it.

It is time to act. We must not be deluded by false hopes or by denial; we are in danger; we must not allow the fact that we do not see the danger laying about in our front yard to make us unwary. If we do nothing, we may lose our chance. And we must let our neighbors, throughout the nation, know of the danger that lurks three feet, two feet, one foot below the surface of our homes, our fields, our parks, and our schools.