



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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SAVe Campaign Statement on the Passing of Legendary Consumer Advocate Clarence Ditlow

Today the Safe Autonomous Vehicles (SAVe) Campaign issued the following statement on the passing of the well-respected and revered champion of consumer safety Clarence Ditlow.

“Clarence Ditlow was much more than the Executive Director of the Center for Auto Safety (CAS). He was much more than the consummate consumer advocate for highway safety. To untold hundreds of thousands of Americans, he was their guardian angel—with a sword in his hands, waging battle after battle with careless auto companies, complacent government bureaucrats, and Congressional lobbyists whose sole existence is based on delaying or obfuscating any need for safety regulation of the auto industry.

“Raised in blue-collar America, educated as an engineer and lawyer, Clarence’s professional life began as a government employee in the U.S. Patent Office, but in the early 1970s he abruptly changed the course of his career path and became a consumer advocate standing side-by-side with Ralph Nader.

“Forty years ago, in 1976, Clarence became the Executive Director of CAS and he never looked back. Despite achieving two legal degrees, Clarence never really saw himself as a lawyer. Here’s how he described himself in court the first time he testified as an expert witness (2003--Shipler v. GMC):

Q. And yearly compensation or the amount of compensation for some of the other expert witnesses in the courtroom has come up. What do you make a year?

A. My salary is \$45,000 a year.

Q. With two law degrees?

A. With two law degrees.

A. I keep telling the fundraisers when they call me up, I'm not like other lawyers.

A. I made a decision about a year ago to begin providing pro bono or free

testimony in selected lawsuits involving areas where the government regulation was inadequate.

“Those of us who had the good fortune to occasionally work alongside Clarence, or ask for his guidance and counsel, found that his enthusiasm for auto safety at the expense of corporate profit was unlimited. Focusing on consumer-protectionist legislation and safety regulation, Mr. Ditlow and the CAS were major proponents of automotive lemon laws that now exist in every state.

“He was also at the forefront of challenges to most of the very serious product defect issues of the past 30 years, including the Ford Pinto, GM side-saddle pickup truck fuel tank flaws, the Firestone/Explorer debacle, demanding mandatory front airbag systems in the late 80s and early 90s, the recall of millions of Toyota vehicles for unintended acceleration, defects in GM ignition switches, and, most recently, with the Takata airbag travesty.

“Clarence was never shy about calling out the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) when it seemed lost. He and Mr. Nader penned a 2014 article in the New York Times, stating forcefully,

‘Over time, the N.H.T.S.A. has been captured by the industry it regulates. Through the ’70s, it aggressively litigated cases to force recalls, and it caught most defects early in the life of a vehicle. Beginning in the ’80s, however, numerous officials — including Diane K. Steed, Jerry Ralph Curry, Sue Bailey and David L. Strickland, who all served as head of the agency, and Erika Z. Jones, Jacqueline S. Glassman and Paul Jackson Rice, who all served as chief counsel to the agency — have gone on to become consultants, lawyers or expert witnesses for auto companies. What’s more, the agency is heavily populated by former industry employees. Ms. Glassman, for example, had been a lawyer for Chrysler before working at the agency (and is now at a law firm that represents auto companies). The agency’s last non-acting administrator, Mr. Strickland, went to work in January of 2014 for a firm representing Chrysler — the same month the agency approved an inadequate recall of Chrysler Jeeps with fuel tanks liable to explode as a result of rear impacts.

‘Only a complete overhaul of the agency’s culture will prevent future recalls, since automakers will always place sales and profits over safety and innovation. This should start with closing the revolving door, adopting criminal penalties and increasing funding. All auto companies should have an independent, government-certified safety ombudsman to investigate complaints from whistle-blowers and to report defects directly to the chief executive and the agency.

‘Above all, the agency’s leaders must have proven transportation safety expertise. They must demonstrate that they see auto companies as an industry to be regulated, rather than partners whose profits and sales must be protected at the public’s expense.’

“About a week before Clarence succumbed to cancer, he was in the middle of planning to gather ‘the troops’ to address new consumer safety challenges which have surfaced over the introduction of computer aided technology (CAT), which portends to release robot cars on our highways.

“He expressed deep concerns about ‘back-to-the-future’ developments in which the NHTSA announced meaningless guidelines allowing the auto industry to regulate itself in the design and performance of these robotic features without government standards.

“Clarence’s death could not have come at a worse time for him, his family and friends, and the American consumer. We stand on a precipice staring at demands for less government, less regulation, and more profit for business without this tireless safety advocate leading the charge. It’s difficult not to shudder in concern that vehicle safety will be sacrificed and the carnage on our highways will drastically rise.

“The best way to celebrate and remember Clarence Ditlow is to pick-up his sword, identify folks who, like him, are willing to selflessly embrace the challenges Americans face between the forces encouraging vehicle safety regulation and the forces that seek profit without consequences.

“We will miss you Clarence. We will not forget your story and your messages. And we will find ways to preserve your legacy. God speed.”

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