

Remarks of Christine Axsmith  
Widow of Justin Benedict  
Killed While Walking in Alexandria, Virginia  
July 25, 2023

On an otherwise uneventful Friday afternoon in November 2020, my husband Justin Benedict was killed while crossing the street by someone driving a truck. My entire world was destroyed. He was the love of my life and I hope what I say encourages you to take pedestrian safety seriously.

Justin and I were friends for 10 years before getting engaged. People thought we were divorced before we were ever married because we had such a high-drama, tumultuous friendship. Finally, we skipped over the whole dating and boyfriend/girlfriend thing and just got engaged to the astonishment of everyone around us.

The world lost a man who could make anyone laugh and who read countless books and remember every one of them. He was brilliant. He got me to read Pilgrims Progress and mocked it relentlessly.

Our daily life was filled with oddball humor and commentary. Justin is irreplaceable. But honestly, everyone is. That's why waiving safety rules for massive numbers of self-driving cars, and one day the same will be asked for trucks, is such a bad idea. Think of the potential sudden and catastrophic impact on families if the algorithm for cybersecurity is insufficient. American families.

Remember the Titanic-exploring submersible, that imploded and killed five people? That manufacturer is on the record noting that industry safety standards didn't apply to his neat new toy. As such, they chose not to invest in basic safety protections. In fact, he said, "You know, at some point, safety is just pure waste." And "You're going to take some risk, and it really is a risk-reward question."

I am here today as a traffic fatality widow to assure you that the risk of waiving existing safety requirements for self-driving cars, and without new safety standards to make sure the technology is working as needed to protect all people on the road, is a risk that is not worth the promised reward.

I urge you not to make the same mistake with experimental technology on our roads, self-driving cars.

Despite the assurances, there is no data that proves self-driving technology is safe and that the sweeping promises will come true.

So, I ask you to consider the grief and loss of every family whose loved one was killed in a traffic crash. And to oppose any bill that takes an approach that could make such a loss more likely.

Thank you.